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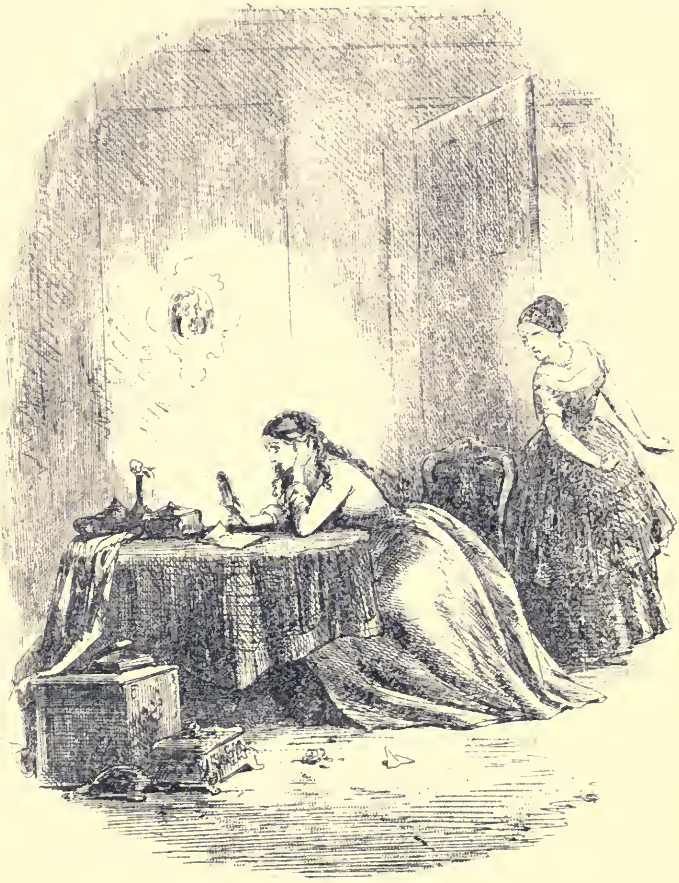

A Discovery

THE DALTONS

OR

THREE ROADS IN LIFE

BY

CHARLES LEVER

AUTHOR OF "CHARLES O'MALLEY"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE DALTONS;

OR,

Three Roads in Life.

CHAPTER I.

A MORNING OF MISADVENTURES.

"WELL, my lord, are we to pass the day here," said Count Trouville, the second of the opposite party, as Norwood returned from a fruitless search of George Onslow, "or are we to understand that this is the English mode of settling such matters?"

"I am perfectly ready, Monsieur le Comte, to prove the contrary, so far as my own poor abilities extend," said Norwood, calmly.

"But your friend has disappeared, sir. You are left alone here."

"Which is, perhaps, the reason of your having dared to insult me," rejoined the other; "that being, perhaps, the French custom in such affairs."

"Come, come, gentlemen," interposed an old cavalry officer, who acted as second friend to Guilmard, "you must both see that all discussion of this kind is irregular and unseemly. We have come here this morning for one specific purpose—to obtain reparation for a great injury. The gentleman who should have offered us the amende has suddenly withdrawn himself. I offer no opinion on the fact that he came out accompanied by only one friend; we might, perhaps, have devised means to obviate this difficulty. For his own absence we have no remedy. I would therefore ask what you have to propose to us in this emergency?"

"A little patience—nothing more. My friend must have lost his way; some accident or other has detained him, and I expect to see him here every instant."

"Shall we say half an hour longer, my lord?" rejoined the other, taking out his watch. "That will bring us to eight o'clock."

"Which, considering that our time was named 'sharp six,'" interposed Trouville, "is a very reasonable 'grace.'"

"Your expression is an impertinence, monsieur," said Norwood, fiercely.

"And yet I don't intend to apologize for it," said the other, smiling.

"I'm glad of it, sir. It's the only thing you have said to-day with either good sense or spirit."

"Enough, quite enough, my lord," replied the Frenchman, gaily. 'Dans la bonne société, on ne dit jamais de trop. Where shall it be, and when?"

"Here, and now," said Norwood, "if I can only find any one who will act for me."

"Pray, my lord, don't go in search of him," said Trouville, "or we shall despair of seeing you here again."

"I will give a bail for my reappearance, sir, that you cannot doubt of," cried Norwood, advancing towards the other with his cane elevated.

A perfect burst of horror broke from the Frenchmen at this threat, and three or four immediately threw themselves between the contending parties.

"But for this, my lord," said the old officer, "I should have offered you my services."

"And I should have declined them, sir," said Norwood, promptly. "The first peasant I meet with will suffice;" and, so saying, he hurried from the spot, his heart almost bursting with passion. With many a malediction of George—with curses deep and cutting on every one whose misconduct had served to place him in his present position—he took his way towards the high road.

"What could have happened?" muttered he; "what confounded fit of poltroonery has seized him? a fellow that never wanted pluck in his life! Is it possible that he can have failed now? And this to occur at the very moment they are beggared! Had they been rich, as they were a few months back, I'd have made the thing pay. Ay, by Jove! I'd have 'coined my blood,' as the fellow says in the play, and written a swingeing cheque with red ink! And now I have had a bad quarrel, and nothing to come of it! And so to walk the high roads in search of some one who can load a pistol."

A stray peasant or two, jogging along to Florence—a postilion with return horses—a shabbily-dressed curate, or a friar with a sack behind him, were all that he saw for miles of distance, and he returned once more to interrogate the calessino driver as to the stranger who accompanied him from the city.

Any one whose misfortune it may have been to make inquiries from an Italian vetturino of any fact, no matter how insignificant or unimportant, will sympathize with Norwood's impatience at the evasive and distrustful replies that now met his questions. Although the fact could have no possible concern or interest for him, he prevaricated and contradicted himself half a dozen times over, as to the stranger's age, country, and appearance, so that, utterly baffled and provoked, the viscount turned away and entered the park.

"I, too, shall be reported missing, I suppose," said he, bitterly, as he walked along a little path that skirted a piece of ornamental water. "By Jupiter! this is a pleasant morning's work, and must have its reparation one day or other."

A hearty sneeze suddenly startled him as he spoke; he turned hastily about, but could see no one, and yet his hearing was not to be deceived! He searched the spot eagerly, he examined the little boat-shed—the copse—the underwood—everything, in fact, but not a trace of living being was to be seen; at last, a slight rustling sound seemed to issue from a piece of rustic shell-work, representing a river god reclining on his urn, and, on approaching, he distinctly detected the glitter of a pair of eyes within the sockets of the figure.

"Here goes for a brace of balls into him," cried Norwood, adjusting a cap on his pistol. "A piece of stonework that sneezes is far too like a man to be trusted."

Scarcely was the threat uttered, when a tremulous scream issued from within, and a voice, broken with terror, called out,—

"D-don't fire, my lord. You'll m-m-murder me. I'm Purvis—Sc-Sc-Scroope Purvis."

"How did you come to be there, then?" asked Norwood, half angrily.

"I'll tell you when I g-get out!" was the answer; and he disappeared from the loophole at which he carried on the conversation for some seconds. Norwood began to fancy that the whole was some mystification of his brain, for no trace of him was to be had, when he emerged from the boat-house with his hat stripped of the brim, and his clothes in tatters, his scratched face and hands attesting that his transit had not been of the easiest. "It's like a r-r-rat-hole," cried he, puffing for breath.

"And what the devil brought you there?" asked Norwood, rudely.

"I ca-came out to see the fight!" cried he; "and when you're inside there you have a view of the whole park, and are quite safe, too."

"Then it was you who drove out in the calessino meant for the doctor?" said Norwood, with the air of a man who would not brook an equivocation.

"Yes; that was a d-d-dodge of mine to get out here," said he, chuckling.

"Well, Master Purvis," said Norwood, drawing his arm within his own, "if you can't be the 'Doctor,' you shall at least be the 'Second.' This is a dodge of mine; so come along, and no more about it."

"But I ca-can't; I never was—I never could be a se-se-second."

"You shall begin to-day, then, or my name's not Norwood. You've been the cause of a whole series of mishaps and misfortunes; and, by Jove! if the penalty were a heavier one, you should pay it."

"I tell you, I n-never saw a duel; I—I never f-fought one; I never will fight one; I don't even know how they g-go about it."

"You shall learn, sir, that's all," said Norwood, as he hastened along, dragging the miserable Purvis at his side.

"But for you, sir," continued he, in a voice thick with passion—"but for you, sir, and your inveterate taste for prying into what does not concern you, we should have experienced no delay nor disappointment this morning. The consequences are, that I shall have to stand where another ought to have stood, and take to myself a quarrel in which I have had no share."

"H-how is that? Do—do—do tell me all about it!" cried Purvis, eagerly.

"I'll tell you nothing, sir; not a syllable. Your personal adventures on this morning must be the subject of your revelations when you get back to Florence, if ever you do get back."

"Why, I—I'm—I'm not going to fight anybody;" exclaimed he, in terror.

"No, sir, but *I* am; and in the event of any disastrous incident, *your* position may be unpleasant. If Trouville falls, you'll have to make for Lombardy, and cross over into Switzerland; if he shoots me, you can take my passport, it is *visé* for the Tyrol. As they know me at Innspruck, you'd better keep to the south'ard—some of the smaller places about Botzen, or Brixen."

"But I don't know Bo-Bo-Botzen on the map! and I don't see why I'm to sk-sk-skulk about the continent like a refu-refu-refugee Pole!"

"Take your own time, then; and, perhaps, ten years in a fortress may make you wiser. It's no affair of mine, you know; and I merely gave you the advice, as I'm a little more up to these things than you are."

"But, supposing that I'll have no-nothing to do with the matter—that I'll not be present—that I refuse to see——"

"You shall and you must, sir; and if I hear another word of objection out of your mouth, or if you expose me, by any show of your own poltroonery, to the ribald insolence of these Frenchmen, by Heaven! I'll hold your hand in my own when I fire at Count Trouville."

"And I may be mu-mu-murdered!" screamed Purvis. "An innocent man's bl-blood shed, all for nothing!"

"Bluebeard treated his wives to the same penalty for the same crime, Master Purvis. And now listen to me, sir, and mark well my words. With the causes which have led to this affair you have no concern whatever; your only business here is in the capacity of my second. Be present when the pistols are loaded; stand by as they step the ground; and, if you can do no more, try at least to look as if you were not going to be shot at." Neither the counsel nor the tone it was delivered in were very reassuring; and Purvis went along with his head down and his hands in his pockets, reflecting on all the "accidents by firearms" he had read of in the newspapers, together with the more terrible paragraphs about fatal duels, and criminal proceedings against all concerned in them.

The Frenchmen were seated in the garden at a table, and smoking their cigars, as Norwood came up, and, in a few words, explained that a countryman of his own, whom he had met by chance, would undertake the duties of his friend.

"I have only to say, gentlemen," he added, "that he has never even witnessed an affair of this kind; and I have but to address myself to the loyal good faith of Frenchmen to supply any deficiencies in his knowledge. Mr. Purvis, Messieurs."

The old colonel having courteously saluted him, took him to a short distance aside, and spoke eagerly for a few minutes, while Norwood, burning with anxiety and uneasiness, tried to smoke his cigar with every semblance of unconcern.

"I'm sure, if you think so," cried Scroope, aloud, "I'm not the m-man to gainsay the opinion. A miss is as g-g-good as a m-mile; and as he didn't strike him——"

"Tonnerre de Dieu! sir—strike him!" screamed the old soldier. "Did you say strike him?"

"No, I didn't—I couldn't have meant that," broke in Purvis. "I meant to remark that, as there was no mischief done——"

"And who will venture to say that, sir?" interposed the other. "Is it nothing that a Frenchman should have been menaced?"

"That's a gr-great deal—a tremendous deal. It's as much as beating another man; I know that," muttered poor Purvis, deprecatingly.

"Is this a sneer, sir?" asked the colonel, drawing himself up to his full height.

"No, no, it ain't; no, upon my soul I'm quite serious. I never was less disposed for a jest in my life."

"You could never have selected a less opportune moment for one, sir," rejoined the other, gravely. "Am I to conclude, sir," resumed he, after a second's interval, "that we have no difference of opinion on this affair?"

"None whatever. I agree with you in everything you have s-said, and everything you in-intend to say."

"Your friend will then apologize?" resumed the colonel.

"He shall—he must."

"Simply expressing his regret that an unguarded action should have occasioned a misconception, and that in lifting his arm he neither intended the gesture as a menace nor an insult. Isn't that your meaning?"

"Just so; and that if he *had* struck he wouldn't have hurt him."

"Feu d'enfer! sir, what *are* you saying; or do you mean this for a mockery of us?" screamed the colonel, in a fit of passion.

"You terrify me so," cried Purvis; "you are so impe-impe-impetuous, I don't know what I'm saying."

The Frenchman measured him with a glance of strange meaning. It was evident that such a character was somewhat new to him, and it required all his skill and acuteness to comprehend it. "Very well, sir," said he, at last, "I leave the details entirely to yourself; speak to your friend, arrange the matter between you, and let us finish the affair as speedily as may be."

"What is all this delay about?" muttered Norwood, angrily, as the other joined him; "is there any difficulty in stepping twelve or twenty paces?"

"None; but we've hit upon a b-better plan, and you've only to say that you're sorry for it all—that you didn't m-mean anything—and that you never did b-b-beat a Frenchman—nor will you ever do so in future."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Norwood in astonishment.

"That we'll all go back and lunch at the 'Luna;' for there's no-nothing to fight about."

Norwood pushed by him contemptuously, and, with hurried steps, walked up to where the old colonel stood. "You are a French officer, sir," said he, "and I rely upon your honour that, whether from the ignorance or inaptitude of that gentleman, no blame may attach itself to me in this business. I have no apology to offer, nor any amende save one."

"Very well, sir, we are ready," said the colonel. "I will ask one of my countrymen to act for you, for I see you are in very indifferent hands."

And now, like men who were well accustomed to the task, they set about the details of the duel, while Purvis, being at full liberty, slipped from the spot, and retired into the wood.

"You've won the first fire, my lord," said a young Frenchman to Norwood; "the conditions are twelve paces—back to back—to turn at the word, and fire."

Norwood bowed, and, without speaking, followed the other to the spot where he was to stand. As he waited thus, pistol in hand, he was directly opposite to the place wherein Purvis had taken refuge, and who, seeing Norwood in front of him, with a cocked pistol, and his finger on the trigger, uttered a scream of terror, and fell flat on the ground. Before the rest could discover the cause of the outcry, a shout from outside of "The Police!" "The Gendarmes!" was heard, and Doctor Grounsell rushed into the garden, followed by several dismounted dragoons. In an instant all were away; Norwood sprang over a low balcony into a vineyard, while in various directions the others scampered off, leaving Purvis alone upon the field

But too happy to have fallen into the safe keeping of the authorities, Purvis accepted his captivity with a most placid contentment.

"Where's Captain Onslow? Have you seen him, sir?" whispered Grounsell to him.

"I have seen everybody, but I don't re-remember anything. It's all a dr-dr-dream to me."

"There was no duel? They hadn't fought?" asked Grounsell.

"I—I—I think not; pro-pro-probably not," said Purvis, whose faculties were still very cloudy.

Grounsell turned away from him in disdain, and entered the house. To all his inquiries from the waiters of the inn the answers were vague and insufficient, nor could the doctor discover either what had occurred, or the reasons of the long delay on the ground. Meanwhile, the *Carabinieri*, stimulated by liberal promises of reward, were searching the park in every quarter, and scouring the country around to arrest the fugitives; and the peasantry, enlisted in the pursuit, hastened hither and thither to aid them. Whether really unable to come up with them, or, as is more probable, concurring in the escape through bribery, the dragoons returned to the inn after about an hour's absence, without the capture of a single prisoner.

Grounsell cursed their Italian indolence, and reviled every institution of their lazy land. How he raved about foreign falsehood and rascality, and wished for a London detective and a magistrate of Bow Street. Never did Lord Palmerston so thirst to implant British institutions in a foreign soil, as did he to teach these "macaroni rascals what a good police meant." What honest indignation did he not vent upon English residents abroad, who, for sake of a mild climate and lax morality, could exchange their native country for the continent; and at last, fairly worn out with his denunciations, he sat down on a bench, tired and exhausted.

"Will you t-t-tell them to let me go?" cried Purvis. "I've done nothing. I never do anything. My name is Purvis — Sc-Sc-Scroope Purvis — bro-brother to Mrs. Ricketts, of the Villino Zoe."

"Matters which have no possible interest for *me*, sir," growled out Grounsell; "nor am I a corporal of gendarmes, to give orders for your liberation."

"But they'll take me to—to prison!" cried Purvis.

"With all my heart, sir, so that I be not your fellow captive," rejoined the doctor, angrily, and left the spot, while the police, taking as many precautions for securing Purvis as though he had been a murderer or a housebreaker, assisted him into a calèche, and, seated one on either side of him, with their carbines unslung, set out for Florence.

"They'll take me for Fr-Fr-Fra Diavolo, if I enter the city in this fashion," cried Purvis; but certainly his rueful expression might have belied the imputation.

Grounsell sat down upon a grassy bench beside the road, overcome with fatigue and disappointment. From the hour of his arrival in Florence he had not enjoyed one moment of rest. On leaving Lady Hester's chamber he had betaken himself to Sir Stafford's apartment, and there till nigh daybreak he sat, breaking the sad tidings of ruin to his old friend, and recounting the terrible story of disasters which were to crush him into poverty. Thence he hastened to George Onslow's room; but he was already gone. A few minutes before he had started with Norwood for Pratolino, and all that remained for Grounsell was to inform the police of the intended meeting, while he himself, wisely suspecting that nothing could go forward in Florence unknown to Jekyl, repaired to that gentleman's residence at once.

Without the ceremony of announcement, Grounsell mounted the stairs, and opened the door of Jekyl's apartment, just as its owner had commenced the preparations for his breakfast. There was an almost Spartan simplicity in the arrangements, which might have made less composed spirits somewhat abashed and ill at ease. The little wooden platter of macaroni, the small coffee-pot of discoloured hue and dinged proportions, the bread of Æthiopian complexion, and the bunch of shrivelled grapes, offered a meal irreproachable on the score of either costliness or epicurism. But Jekyl, far from feeling disconcerted at their exposure to a stranger's eyes, seemed to behold them with sincere satisfaction, and, with a most courteous smile, welcomed the doctor to Florence, and thanked him for the very polite attention of so early a visit.

"I believe I ought to apologize for the unseasonable hour, sir," blundered out Grounsell, who was completely thrown off his balance by this excessive urbanity; "but the cause must plead for me."

"Any cause which has conferred the honour on me is sure of being satisfactory. Pray come nearer the table. You'll find that macaroni eat better than it looks. The old Duke de Montmartre always recommended macaroni to be served on wood. His maxim was, 'Keep the "plat d'argent" for a mayonnaise or a galantine.'"

"Excuse me if I cannot join you, sir. Nothing but a matter of extreme importance could warrant my present intrusion. I only reached this city a few hours back, and I find everything at the Mazzarini Palace in a state of discord and confusion. Some are questions for time and consideration; others are more immediately pressing. One of these is this affair of George Onslow's. Who is he about to meet, and for what?"

"His antagonist is a very agreeable young man, quite a gentleman, I assure you, attached to the French mission here, and related to the 'Morignys,' whom you must have met at 'Madame Parivaux's' formerly."

"Never heard of one of them, sir. But what's the quarrel?"

"It originated, I believe, in some form of disputation—an altercation," simpered Jekyl, as he sweetened and sipped his coffee.

"A play transaction—a gambling affair, eh?"

"I fancy not; Count Guilmard does not play."

"So far, so good," said Grounsell. "Now, sir, how is it to be arranged?—what settlement can be effected? I speak to you frankly, perhaps bluntly, Mr. Jekyl, for my nature has few sympathies with courteous ambiguities. Can this business be accommodated without a meeting?"

Jekyl shook his head, and gave a soft, plaintive little sigh.

"Is friendly interference out of the question, sir?"

Another shake of the head, and a sigh.

"Is there any law in the country? Can the police do nothing?"

"The frontiers are always easily accessible," simpered Jekyl, as he stole a look at his watch.

"Ay, to be sure," broke in Grounsell, indignantly; "the very geography of the continent assists this profligacy, and five paces over an imaginary boundary gives immunity in a case of murder! Well, sir, come along with me to the place of meeting. It is just possible that we may be of some service even yet."

"Nothing could be more agreeable to me than the opportunity of cultivating your acquaintance, Doctor Grounsell, but I have already sent off a few lines to Lord Norwood, to apologize for my absence—a previous engagement."

"What! at this hour of the morning, sir!" burst out Grounsell.

"Even at this early hour, doctor, our cares, commence," said Jekyl, blandly.

"Upon this occasion they must give way to duties, then," said Grounsell, sternly. "The word may sound strangely in your ears, sir, but I use it advisedly. You have been well received and hospitably entertained by this family. They have shown you many marks of kindness and attention. Now is the opportunity to make some sort of requital. Come, then, and see if this young man cannot be rescued from peril."

"You touch my feelings in the very tenderest spot," said Jekyl, softly. "When gratitude is mentioned, I am a child—a mere child."

"Be a man, then, for once, sir; put on your hat and accompany me," cried Grounsell.

"Would you have me break an appointment, doctor?"

"Ay, to be sure I would, sir—at least, such an appointment as I suspect yours to be. This may be a case of life or death."

"How very dreadful!" said Jeykl, settling his curls at the glass. "Pascal compares men to thin glass phials, with an explosive powder within them, and really one sees the force of the similitude every day; but Jean Paul improves upon it by saying that we are all burning-glasses of various degrees of density, so that our passions ignite at different grades of heat."

"Mine are not very far from the focal distance at this moment," said Grounsell, with savage energy; "so fetch your hat, sir, at once, or——"

"Unless I prefer a cap, you were going to add," interposed Jekyl, with a sweet smile.

"We must use speed, sir, or we shall be too late," rejoined the doctor.

"I flatter myself few men understand a rapid toilet better," said Jekyl, rising from the table; "so if you'll amuse yourself with *Bell's Life*, *Punch*, or Jules Janin, for five minutes, I'm your man."

"I can be company for myself for that space, sir," said the other, gruffly, and turned to the window, while Jekyl, disappearing behind the drapery that filled the doorway, was heard humming an opera air from within.

Grounsell was in no superlative mood of good temper with the world, nor would he have extended to the section of it he best knew the well-known eulogy on the "Bayards." "Swindlers," "Rakes," and "Vagabonds" were about the mildest terms of the vocabulary he kept muttering to himself, while a grumbling thunder-growl of malediction followed each. The very aspect of the little chamber seemed to offer food for his anger: the pretentious style of its decoration jarred and irritated him, and he felt a wish to smash bronzes, and brackets, and statues into one common ruin.

The very visiting-cards which lay scattered over a Sèvres dish offended him; the names of all that were most distinguished in rank and station, with here and there some little civility inscribed on the corner, "Thanks," "Come, if possible," or "Of course we expect you," showing the social request in which Jekyl stood.

"Ay," muttered he to himself, "here is one that can neither give dinners nor balls, get places nor pensions nor orders, lend money nor lose it, and yet the world wants him, and cannot get on without him. The indolence of profligacy seeks the aid of his stimulating activity, and the palled appetite of sensualism has to borrow the relish from vice that gives all its piquancy. Without him as the fly-wheel, the whole machinery of mischief would stand still. His boast is, that, without a sou, no millionaire is richer than he, and that every boon of fortune is at his beck. He might add, that in his comprehensive view of wickedness, he realizes within himself all the vice of this good capital. I'd send such a fellow to the treadmill—I'd transport him for life—I'd sentence him to hunt kangaroos for the rest of his days—I'd——" He stopped short in his violent tirade, for he suddenly bethought him how he himself was at that very moment seeking aid and assistance at his hands, and somewhat abashed by the recollection, he called out, "Mr. Jekyl, are you ready yet?"

No answer was returned to this question, and Grounsell repeated it in a louder voice. All was silent, and not even the dulcet sounds of the air from "Lucia" broke the stillness; and now the Doctor, losing all patience, drew aside the curtain and looked in. The chamber was empty, and Jekyl was gone! His little portmanteau and his still smaller carpet-bag, his hat-case, his canes—every article of his *personnel*, were away; and while Grounsell stood cursing the "little rascal," he himself was pleasantly seated opposite Lady Hester and Kate in the travelling-carriage, and convulsing them with laughter at his admirable imitation of the poor doctor.

Great as was Grounsell's anger at this trickery, it was still greater when he discovered that he had been locked in. He quite forgot the course of time passed in his meditations, and could not believe it possible that there was sufficient interval to have effected all these arrangements so speedily.

Too indignant to brook delay, he dashed his foot through the door, and passed out. The noise at once summoned the people of the house to the spot, and, to Grounsell's surprise, the police officer amongst them, who, in all the pomp of office, now barred the passage with a drawn sword.

"What is it?—what's this?" cried he, in astonishment.

"Effraction by force in case of debt is punishable by the 127th section of the 'Code,'" said a dirty little man, who, with the air of a shoeblack, was still a leading member of the Florence "Bar."

"I owe nothing here—not a farthing, sir; let me pass," cried Grounsell.

"'Fathers for sons of nonage or over that period, domiciliated in the same house,'" began the Advocate, reading out of a volume in his hand, "'are also responsible.'"

"What balderdash, sir! I have no son; I never was married in my life; and as for this Mr. Jekyl, if you mean to father him on me, I'll resist to the last drop of my blood."

"'Denunciation and menace, with show of arms or without,'" began the lawyer again, "'are punishable by fine and imprisonment.'"

Grounsell was now so worked up by fury that he attempted to force a passage by main strength; but a general brandishing of knives by all the family, from seven years of age upwards, warned him that the attempt might be too serious, while a wild chorus of abusive language arose from various sympathizers who poured in from the street to witness the scene.

A father who would not pay for his own son! an "assassin," who had no bowels for his kindred; a "Birbante," a "Briccone," and a dozen similar epithets, rattled on him like hail, till Grounsell, supposing that the "bite" might be in proportion to the "bark," retreated into a small chamber, and proposed terms of accommodation. Few men take pleasure in acquitting their own debts, fewer still like to pay those of their neighbours, and Grounsell set about the task in anything but a pleasant manner. There was one redeeming feature, however, in the affair. Jekyl's schedule could not have extracted a rebuke from the severest Commissioner of Bankruptcy. His household charges were framed on the most moderate scale of expenditure. A few crowns for his house-rent, a few "Pauls," for his eatables, and a few "Grazie" for his washing, comprised the whole charge of his establishment, and not even Hume would have sought to cut down the "estimates." Doubtless, more than one-half of the demands were unjust and extortionate, and many were perhaps already acquitted; but as all the rogueries were but homœopathic iniquities after all, their doses might be endured with patience. His haste to conclude the arrangements had, however, a very opposite tendency. The more yielding he became, the greater grew their exactions, and several times the treaty threatened to open hostilities again: and at last it was full an hour after Jekyl's departure that Grounsell escaped from durance, and was free to follow George Onslow to Pratolino.

With his adventures in the interval the reader is sufficiently acquainted; and we now come back to that moment where, bewildered and lost, he sat down upon the bench beside the high road.

CHAPTER II.

A SAD HOUSEHOLD.

It was already past noon when Grounsell reached Florence. He was delayed at the gate by the authorities examining a peasant's cart in front of him—a process which appeared to take a most unusual degree of care and scrutiny—and thus gave the doctor another occasion for inveighing against the "stupid ignorance of foreigners, who throw every possible impediment in the way of traffic and intercourse."

"What have they discovered now?" cried he, testily, as in a crowd of vehicles, of all sorts and sizes, he was jammed up like a coal vessel in the river. "Is the peasant a revolutionary General in disguise? or has he got Bibles, or British cutlery, under the straw of his baroccino?"

"No, eccellenza." (Every one in a passion in Italy is styled eccellenza, as an "anodyne.") "It's a sick man, and they don't know what to do with him."

"Is there a duty on ague or nervous fever?" asked he, angrily.

"They suspect he's dead, Eccellenza, and, if so, there's no use in bringing him into the city, to bring him out again by-and-by."

"And don't they know if a man be dead or alive?"

"Not when he's a foreigner, illustrissimo; and such is the case here."

"Ah! very true," said Grounsell, dryly, as if acquiescing in the truth of the remark. "Let me have a look at him; perhaps I can assist their judgment." And with this he descended, and made his way through the crowd who, in all the eagerness of curiosity, thronged around the cart. A peasant's great-coat was drawn over the figure and even the face of the sick man, as he lay at full length on the mat flooring of the barroccino; and on his chest some pious hand had deposited a rosary and a wooden crucifix.

Grounsell hastily drew back the covering, and then clutching an arm of those at either side of him, he uttered a faint cry, for the pale and deathlike features before him were those of George Onslow. The instincts of the doctor, however, soon rose above every other feeling, and his hand seized the wrist and felt for the pulse. Its beatings were slow, laboured, and irregular, denoting the brain as the seat of injury. Grounsell, therefore, proceeded to examine the head, which, covered with clogged and matted blood, presented a terrific appearance; yet neither there nor elsewhere was there any trace of injury by fire-arms. The history of discovery was soon told. A shepherd had detected the body as he passed the spot, and hailing some peasants on their way to Florence, advised their taking charge of it to the city, where they would be surely recompensed. The natural suggestion of Grounsell's mind was, that, in making his escape from the gendarmes, Onslow had fallen over a cliff. To convey him home, and get him to bed, if possible, before Sir Stafford should hear of the misfortune, was his first care; and in this he succeeded. It was the time when Sir Stafford usually slept; and Grounsell was able to examine his patient, and satisfy himself that no fatal injury was done, long before the old baronet awoke.

"Sir Stafford wishes to see you, sir; he asked for you repeatedly to-day," said Proctor.

"Has he heard—does he know anything of this?" said Grounsell, with a gesture to the bed where George lay.

"Not a word, sir. He was very cheerful all the morning, but wondering where you could have gone, and what Mister George was doing."

"Now for it, then," muttered Grounsell to himself, as, with clasped hands and knitted brows, he walked along; his mind suffering the very same anxieties as had oftentimes beset him on the eve of some painful operation in his art.

"Well, Grounsell," said the old man, with a smile, as he entered, "is it to give me a foretaste of my altered condition that you all desert me to-day? You have never come near me, nor George either, so far as I can learn."

"We've had a busy morning of it, Stafford," said the doctor, sitting down on the bed, and laying his finger on the pulse. "You are better—much better to-day. Your hand is like itself, and your eye is free from fever."

"I feel it, Grounsell—I feel as if, with some twenty years less upon my back, I could like to begin my tussle with the world, and try issue with the best."

"You're young enough, and active enough yet, for what is before you, Stafford. Yesterday I told you of everything in colours perhaps gloomier than reality. The papers of to-day are somewhat more cheery in their tidings. The hurricane may pass over, and leave us still afloat; but there is another trial for you, my old friend, and you must take heart to bear it well and manfully."

Sir Stafford sat up in his bed, and, grasping Grounsell by either shoulder, cried out, "Go on—tell it quickly."

"Be calm, Stafford; be yourself, my old friend," said Grounsell, terrified at the degree of emotion he had called up. "Your own courageous spirit will not desert you now."

"I know it," said the old man, as, relaxing his grasp, he fell back upon the pillow, and then, turning on his face, he uttered a deep groan. "I know your tidings now," cried he, in a burst of agony. "Oh, Grounsell, what is all other disgrace compared to this?"

"I am speaking of George—of your son," interposed Grounsell, hastily, and seizing with avidity the opportunity to reveal all at once. "He left this for Pratolino this morning to fight a duel, but by some mischance has fallen over a cliff, and is severely injured."

"He's dead—you would tell me he is dead!" said the old man, in a faint, thrilling whisper.

"Far from it. Alive, and like to live, but still sorely crushed and wounded."

"Oh, God!" cried the old man, in a burst of emotion, "what worldiness is in my heart when I am thankful for such tidings as this! When it is a relief to me to know that my child, my only son, lies maimed and broken on a sick bed, instead of—instead of——" A gush of tears here broke in upon his utterance, and he wept bitterly.

Grounsell knew too well the relief such paroxysms afford to interfere with their course, while, to avoid any recurrence, even in thought, to the cause, he hurriedly told all that he knew of George's intended meeting with the Frenchman, and his own share in disturbing the rendezvous.

Sir Stafford never spoke during this recital. The terrible shock seemed to have left its stunning influence on his faculties, and he appeared scarcely able to take in with clearness the details into which the other entered.

"She's gone to Como, then," were the first words he uttered—"to this villa the prince has lent her?"

"So I understand; and, from what Proctor says, the Russian is going to marry the Dalton girl."

"Miss Dalton is along with Lady Hester?"

"To be sure; they travel together, and George was to have followed them."

"Even scandal, Grounsell, can make nothing of this. What say you, man?"

"You may defy it on that score, Stafford; but let us talk of what is more imminent—of George."

"I must see him, Grounsell; I must see my poor boy," said he, rising and making an effort to get out of bed; but weakness and mental excitement together overcame him, and he sank back again, fainting and exhausted. To this a deep, heavy sleep succeeded, and Grounsell stole away, relieved in mind, by having acquitted himself of his painful task, and free to address his thoughts to other cares.

"Lord Norwood wishes to see you, sir," said a servant to the doctor, as he at last seated himself for a moment's rest in his chamber; and before Grounsell could reply, the noble viscount entered.

"Excuse this abrupt visit, sir; but I have just heard of poor Onslow's accident. Is there any danger in his condition?"

"Great and imminent danger, my lord."

"By Jove!—sorry for it. You don't happen to know how it occurred?"

"A fall evidently was the cause, but how incurred I cannot even guess."

"In the event of his coming about again, when might we expect to see him all right—speaking loosely, of course?"

"Should he recover, it will take a month, or perhaps two, before he convalesces."

"The devil it will! These Frenchmen can't be made to understand the thing at all; and as Guilmard received a gross personal outrage, he is perfectly out of his mind at the delay in obtaining satisfaction. What is to be done?"

"I am a poor adviser in such cases, my lord; nor do I see that the matter demands any attention from us whatever."

"Not from *you*, perhaps," said Norwood, insolently; "but I had the misfortune to go out as his friend! My position is a most painful and critical one."

"I should suppose that no one will understand how to deal with such embarrassments better than your lordship."

"Thanks for the good opinion; the speech I take to be a compliment, however you meant it. I believe I am not altogether unskilled in such affairs, and it is precisely because such is the case that I am here now. Onslow, in other hands than mine, is a ruined man. The story, tell it how you will, comes to this: that, having gone out to meet a man he had grossly insulted, he wanders away from the rendezvous, and is found some hours after at the foot of the cliff, insensible. He may have fallen, he may have been waylaid—though everything controverts this notion—or, lastly, he may have done the act himself.

There will be advocates for each view of the case; but it is essential, for his honour and reputation, that one story should be authenticated. Now, I am quite ready to stand godfather to such a version, taking all the consequences, however serious, on myself."

"This is very kind, very generous indeed, my lord," said Grounsell, suddenly warming into an admiration of one he was always prejudiced against.

"Oh, I'm a regular John Bull!" said the viscount, at once assuming the burden of that canticle, which helped him in all moments of hypocrisy. "Always stand by the old stock—nothing like them, sir. The Anglo-Saxon blood will carry all before it yet; never suffer a rascally foreigner to put his foot on one of your countrymen. Have him out, sir; parade the fellow at once: that's my plan."

"I like your spirit!" cried Grounsell, enthusiastically.

"To be sure you do, old cock!" exclaimed Norwood, clapping him familiarly on the shoulder. "Depend upon it, *I'll* pull George through this. *I'll* manage the matter cleverly. There must be no mistake about it—no room for doubt or equivocation, you know. All straightforward, open, and manly: John Bull every inch of it. That's *my* notion, at least—I hope it's yours?"

"Perfectly—thoroughly so!"

"Well, then, just hand that note to Sir Stafford."—Here he placed a sealed letter in Grounsell's hand.—"Tell him what I've just told you. Let him fairly understand the whole question, and let me have the contents this evening at the *café* in the Santa Trinità—say about nine o'clock—not later than that. These fellows always gather about that hour."

"I'll take care of it," said Grounsell.

"All right!" cried Norwood, gaily, as he arose and adjusted the curls beneath his hat. "My compliments to the old gent, and tell George not to make himself uneasy. He's in safe hands. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my lord, good-bye," said Grounsell, who, as he looked after him, felt, as it were, unconsciously recurring to all his former prejudices and dislikes of the noble viscount. "Those fellows," muttered he, "are as inexplicable to me as a new malady, of which I neither know the stages nor the symptoms! The signs I take for those of health may be precisely the indications of corruption, and what I deem unsound may turn out to be exactly the opposite." And so he fell into a musing fit, in which certainly his estimate of Lord Norwood continued steadily to fall lower and lower the longer he thought of him. "He must be a rogue!—he must be a scoundrel! Nature makes all its blackguards plausible, just as poison-berries are always brilliant to look at. They are both intended to be the correctives of rash impressions, and I was only a fool ever to be deceived by him. Out of this, at all hazards—that's the first thing!" muttered Grounsell to himself, as he walked hastily up and down the room. "The place is like a plague district, and we must not carry an infected rag away from it! Glorious Italy, forsooth! There's more true enlightenment, there's a higher purpose, and a nobler view of life, in the humblest English village, than in the proudest halls of their Eternal City!"

In such pleasant reflections on national character he entered Sir Stafford's room, and found his friend seated at a table covered with newly arrived letters; the seals were all unbroken, and the sick man was turning them over, and gazing at the different handwritings with a sad and listless apathy.

"I'm glad you've come, Grounsell. I have not courage for this," said he, pointing to the mass of letters before him.

"Begging impostors, one half of them, I'll be sworn!" said Grounsell, seating himself to the work. "Was I not right? Here's a Cabinet Minister suing for your vote on an Irish question, and entreating your speedy return to England, 'where, he trusts, the object you are both interested in may be satisfactorily arranged.' Evasive rascal! Couldn't he say, 'You shall have the Peerage for your support'? Wouldn't it be more frank, and more intelligible, to declare, 'We take you at your price'? These," said he, throwing half a dozen contemptuously from him, "are all from your constituents. The 'independent borough' contains seventy electors, and, if you owned the patronage of the two services, with a fair share of the public offices and India, you couldn't content them. I'd tell them fairly, 'I have bought you already; the article is paid for and sent home. Let us hear no more about it!' This is more cheering. Shoenhals, of Riga, stands firm, and the Rotterdam house will weather the gale. That's good news, Onslow!" said he, grasping the old man's hand. "This is from Calcutta. Prospects are brightening a little in that quarter too. Come, come—there's some blue in the sky. Who knows what good weather's in store for us?"

Onslow's lip trembled, and he passed his hand over his eyes without speaking.

"This is from Como," said Grounsell, half angrily, tossing away a highly-perfumed little three-cornered note.

"Give it to me—let me see it," said Onslow, eagerly, while with trembling fingers he adjusted his spectacles to read. Grounsell handed him the epistle, and walked to the window.

"She's quite well," read Sir Stafford, aloud; "they had delightful weather on the road, and found Como in full beauty on their arrival." Grounsell grumbled some angry mutterings between his teeth, and shrugged up his shoulders disdainfully. "She inquires most kindly after me, and wishes me to join them there, for Kate Dalton's betrothal."

"Yet she never took the trouble to visit you when living under the same roof!" cried Grounsell, indignantly.

The old man laid down the letter, and seemed to ponder for some moments.

"What's the amount?—how much is the sum?" asked Grounsell, bluntly.

"The amount!—the sum!—of what?" inquired Sir Stafford.

"I ask, what demand is she making, that it is prefaced thus?"

"By Heaven! if you were not a friend of more than fifty years' standing, you should never address me as such again," cried Onslow, passionately. "Has ill-nature so absorbed your faculties that you have not a good thought or good feeling left you?"

"My stock of them decreases every day—ay, every hour, Onslow," said he, with a deeper emotion than he had yet displayed. "It is indeed a sorry compromise, that if age is to make us wiser, it should make us less amiable also!"

"You are not angry with me?—not offended, Grounsell?" said Onslow, grasping his hand in both his own.

"Not a bit of it. But, as to temperament, *I* can no more help *my* distrust, than *you* can conquer *your* credulity, which is a happier philosophy, after all."

"Then come, read that letter, Grounsell," said Onslow, smiling pleasantly; "put your prejudices aside for once, and be just, if not generous."

Grounsell took the note, and walked to the window to read it. The note was just what he expected—a prettily-turned inquiry after her husband's health, interwoven with various little pleasantries of travelling, incidents of the road, and so forth. The invitation was a mere suggestion, and Grounsell was half angry at how little there was to find fault with; for, even to the "Very sincerely yours, Hester Onslow," all was as commonplace as need be. Accidentally turning over the page, however, he found a small slip of silver paper—a bank cheque for five hundred pounds, only wanting Onslow's signature. Grounsell crushed it convulsively in his palm, and handed the note back to Onslow, without a word.

"Well, are you convinced?—are you satisfied now?" asked Onslow, triumphantly.

"I am perfectly so!" said Grounsell with a deep sigh. "You must write, and tell her that business requires your immediate presence in England, and that George's condition will necessitate a return by sea. Caution her that the Daltons should be consulted about this marriage—which, so far as I know, they have not been; and I would advise, also, seeing that there may be some interval before you can write again, that you should send her a cheque,—say for five hundred pounds."

"So you *can* be equitable, Grounsell," cried the other, joyously.

"And here is a letter from Lord Norwood," said Grounsell, not heeding the remark, and breaking the seal as he spoke. "Laconic, certainly. 'Let me have the enclosed by this evening.—N.' The enclosed are five acceptances for two hundred each; the 'value received' being his lordship's services in upholding your son's honour. Now here at least, Onslow, I'll have my own way." And, with these words, he seated himself at a table and wrote,—

"MY LORD,—Living in a land where assassination is cheap, and even men of small fortune can keep a Bravo, I beg to return your lordship's bills, without submitting them to my friend for endorsement, your price being considerably above the tariff of the country, and more calculated to your own exigencies than the occasion which it was meant to remunerate.—I am, yours,

"PAUL GROUNSELL."

"What have you said there, Grounsell? You look so self-satisfied, it can scarcely be over-civil."

"There—'To the Viscount Norwood,'" said Grounsell, as he sealed and addressed the note. "We are getting through our work rapidly. In a week, or even less, if George's symptoms show nothing worse, we shall get away from this; and even on the sea one feels half as though it were England."

We need not follow Grounsell through the busy days which ensued, nor track him in his various negotiations with tradespeople, bankers, house-agents, and that legionary class which are called "commissionaires;" enough if we say, that, in arranging for the departure of his friends, his impressions of Italian roguery received many an additional confirmation; and that, when the last day of their sojourn arrived, his firm conviction was that none but a millionaire could afford to live in this the very cheapest capital of Europe!

And now they are gone! steaming calmly away across the Gulf of Genoa. They have closed the little episode of their life in Italy, and, with heavy hearts, are turning homeward. The great Mazzarini Palace looks sad and forlorn, nor do we mean to linger much longer on a scene whence the actors have departed.

CHAPTER III.

A LAST SCENE.

One last glance at the Mazzarini Palace, and we leave it for ever.

Seated in the drawing-room where Lady Hester once held sway, in the very chair around which swarmed her devoted courtiers and admirers, Mrs. Ricketts now reclined, pretty much on the same terms, and with probably some of the same sentiments, as Louis Blanc, or his friend Albert, might have experienced on finding themselves domesticated within the Palace of the Luxembourg. They were, so to say, parallel circumstances. There had been a great reverse of fortune, an abdication, and a flight. The sycophants of the day before were the masters now, and none disputed the pretensions of any bold enough to assume dictation. To be sure, Mrs. Ricketts's rule, like Ledru Rollin's, was but a provisional government; for already the bills for an approaching sale of everything were posted over the front of the palace, and Racca Morlache's people were cataloguing every article with a searching accuracy, very tormenting to the beholders.

From some confused impression that they were friends of Lady Hester, and that Mrs. Ricketts's health was in a precarious condition, Sir Stafford gave orders that they should not be molested in any way, but permitted to prolong their stay to the latest period compatible with the arrangement for sale. A sense of gratitude, too, mingled with these feelings; for Mrs. Ricketts had never ceased to indite euphuistic notes of inquiry after George himself, —send presents of impracticable compounds of paste and preserves, together with bottles of mixtures, lotions, embrocations, and liniments,—one tithe of which would have invalided a regiment. Grounsell, it is true, received these civilities in a most unworthy spirit; called her "an old humbug," with a very unpolite expletive annexed to it; and all but hurled the pharmacopœia at the head of the messenger. Still, he had other cares too pressing to suffer his mind to dwell on such trifles; and when Onslow expressed a wish that the family should not be disturbed in their occupancy, he merely muttered, "Let them stay and be d——d;" and thought no more of them.

Now, although the palace was, so to speak, dismantled, the servants discharged, the horses sent to livery for sale, the mere residence was convenient for Mrs. Ricketts. It afforded a favourable opportunity for a general "doing up" of the Villino Zoe—a moment for which all her late ingenuity had not been able to provide. It opened a convenient occasion, too, for supplying her own garden with a very choice collection of flowers from the Mazzarini—fuschias, geraniums, and orchidæ, being far beyond all the inventorial science of Morlache's men; and lastly, it conferred the pleasing honour of dating all her despatches to her hundred correspondents from the Palazzo Mazzarini, where, to oblige her dear Lady Hester, she was still lingering—"*Se sacrificando*", as she delighted to express it, "*ai doveri dell' amicizia*." To these cares she had now vowed herself a martyr. The general believed in her sorrows; Martha would have sworn to them; and not a whit the less sincerely, that she spent hours in secreting tulip roots and hyacinths, while a deeper scheme was in perpetration—no less than to substitute a copy of a Gerard Dow for the original, and thus transmit the genius of the Ricketts family to a late posterity. Poor Martha would have assisted in a murder at her bidding, and not had a suspicion of its being a crime!

It was an evening "at home to her few most intimate friends," when Mrs. Ricketts, using the privilege of an invalid, descended to the drawing-room in a costume which united an ingenious compromise between the habit of waking and sleeping. A short tunic, a kind of female monkey-jacket, of faded yellow satin edged with swansdown, and a cap of the same material, whose shape was borrowed from that worn by the beefeaters, formed the upper portion of a dress to which wide fur boots, with gold tassels, and a great hanging pocket, like a sabretasche, gave a false air of a military costume. "It was singular," she would remark, with a bland smile, "but very becoming!" Besides, it suited every clime. She used to come down to breakfast in it at Windsor Castle; "the Queen liked it;" the Bey of Tripoli loved it; and the Hospodar of Wallachia had one made for himself exactly from the pattern. Her guests were the same party we have already introduced to our reader in the Villino Zoe—Haggerstone, the Pole, and Foglass, being the privileged few admitted into her august presence, and who came to make up her whist-table, and offer their respectful homage on her convalescence.

The Carnival was just over, the dull season of Lent had begun, and the Ricketts's tea-table was a resource when nothing else offered. Such was the argument of Haggerstone as he took a cheap dinner with Foglass at the Luna.

"She's an infernal bore, sir—that I know fully as well as you can inform me—but please to tell me who isn't a bore." Then he added, in a lower voice, "Certainly it ain't *you!*"

"Yes, yes—I agree with you," said Foglass; "she has reason to be sore about the Onslows' treatment."

"I said a bore, sir—not sore," screamed out Haggerstone.

"Ha!" replied the other, not understanding the correction. "I remember one day, when Townsend——"

"D——n Townsend!" said Haggerstone.

"No, not Dan—Tom Townsend. That fellow who was always with Mathews."

"Walk a little quicker, and you may talk as much balderdash as you please," said the other, buttoning up his coat, and resolving not to pay the slightest attention to his companion's agreeability.

"Who is here?" asked Haggerstone, as he followed the servant up the stairs.

"Nobody but Count Petrolaffsky, sir."

"Un Comte à bon compte," muttered Haggerstone to himself, always pleased when he could be sarcastic, even in soliloquy. "They'll find it no easy matter to get a tenant for this house now-a-days. Florence is going down, sir, and will soon be little better than Boulogne-sur Mer."

"Very pleasant, indeed, for a month in summer," responded Foglass, who had only caught up the last word. "Do you think of going there?"

"Going there!" shouted out the other, in a voice that made misconception impossible. "About as soon as I should take lodgings in Wapping for country air!"

This speech brought them to the door of the drawing-room, into which Haggerstone now entered, with that peculiar step which struck him as combining the jaunty slide of a man of fashion with the martial tread of an old soldier.

"Ha! my old adherents—all my faithful ones!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts, giving a hand to each to kiss; and then, in a voice of deep emotion, she said, "Bless you both! May peace and happiness be beneath your roof-trees! joy sit beside your hearth!"

Haggerstone reddened a little; for however alive to the ludicrous in his neighbours, he was marvellously sensitive as to having a part in the piece himself.

"You are looking quite yourself again," said he, bluntly.

"The soul, indeed, is unchanged; the spirit——"

"What's become of Purvis?" broke in Haggerstone, who never gave any quarter to these poetic flights.

"You'll see him presently. He has been so much fatigued and exhausted by this horrid police investigation, that he never gets up till late. I've put him on a course of dandelion and aconite, too; the first effect of which is always unpleasant."

Leaving Foglass in conclave with the hostess, Haggerstone now approached the count, who had for several times performed his toilet operation of running his hands through his hair, in expectation of being addressed.

"How d'ye do—any piquet lately?" asked the colonel, half cavalierly.

"As if I was tinking of piquet, wid my country in shains! How you can aske me dat?"

"What did you do with Norwood t'other night?" resumed the other, in a voice somewhat lower.

"Won four hundred and fifty—but he no pay!"

"Nor ever will."

"What you say?—not pay me what I wins!"

"Not a sou of it."

"And dis you call English noblemans—pair d'Angleterre!"

"Hush! Don't be carried away by your feelings. Some men Norwood won't pay because he doesn't know them. There are others he treats the same way, because he *does* know them—very equitable, eh?"

The observation seemed more intelligible to the Pole than polite, for he bit his lip and was silent, while Haggerstone went on,—

"He's gone, and that, at least, is a point gained; and now that these Onslows have left this, and that cur Jekyl, we may expect a little quietness, for a while at least; but here comes Purvis." And that worthy individual was led in on Martha's arm, a large green shade over his eyes, and his face plentifully sprinkled with flour.

"What's the matter with you, man? You're 'got up' like a ghost in a melodrama."

"They've taken all the cuti-cuti-cuti——"

"Call it skin, sir, and go on."

"Sk-skin off my face with a lin-liniment," cried he, "and I could sc-scream out with pain whenever I speak!"

"Balm of marigolds, with the essential oil of crab-apple," said Martha. "I made it myself."

"I wish to Hea-Heaven you had tr-tried it too," whispered he.

"Brother Scroope, you are ungrateful," said Mrs. Ricketts, with the air of a judge, charging. "The vicissitudes of temperature, here, require the use of astringents. The excessive heat of that police-court——"

"By the way, how has that affair ended?" asked Haggerstone.

"I'll tell you," screamed out Purvis, in a burst of eagerness. "They've fi-fi-fined me a hundred and f-f-fifty scudi for being w-where I never was, and fighting somebody I n-never saw."

"You got off cheaply, sir. I've known a man sentenced to the galleys for less; and with a better character to boot," muttered he to himself.

"Lord Norwood and the rest said that I was a pr-pr-principal, and he swore that he found me hiding in a cave."

"And did he so?"

"Yes; but it was only out of curi-curi-curi——"

"Curiosity, sir, like other luxuries, must be paid for; and, as you seem a glutton, your appetite may be expensive to you."

"The mystery remains unsolved as to young Onslow, colonel?" said Mrs. Ricketts, half in question.

"I believe not, madam. The explanation is very simple. The gallant guardsman, having heard of Guilmard's skill, preferred being reported 'missing' to 'killed,' having previously arranged with Norwood to take his place. The price was, I fancy, a smart one—some say five thousand, some call it ten. Whatever the amount, it has not been paid, and Norwood is furious."

"But the accident?"

"As for that, madam, nothing more natural than to crack your skull when you lose your head." And Haggerstone drew himself up with the proud consciousness of his own smartness.

"Then of course the poor young man is ruined?" observed Martha.

"I should say so, madam—utterly ruined. He may figure on the committee of a Polish ball, but any other society would of course reject him." This was said to obtain a sneer at Petrolaffsky, without his being able to guess why. "I believe I may say, without much fear of contradiction, that these Onslows were all humbugs! The old banker's wealth, my lady's refinement, the guardsman's spirit, were all in the same category—down-right humbugs!"

"How he hates us—how he detests the aristocracy," said Mrs. Ricketts, in a whisper to the Pole.

"And de Dalton—what of her?—is she millionaire?" asked Petrolaffsky.

"The father a small shopkeeper in Baden, sir; children's toys, nut-crackers, and paper-knives being the staple of his riches. Foglass can tell you all about it. He wants to hear about those Daltons," screamed he into the deaf man's ear.

"Poor as Job—hasn't sixpence—lives 'three-pair back,' and dines for a 'zwanziger.' Lame daughter makes something by cutting heads for canes and umbrellas. He picks up a trifle about the hotels."

"Ach Gott! and I was so near be in loaf wid de sister!" muttered the Pole.

"She is likely to d-d-do better, count," cackled in Purvis. "She caught her Tartar—ha, ha, ha!"

"Midchekoff doesn't mean marriage, sir, depend upon it," said Haggerstone.

"Martha, leave the room, my dear," said Mrs. Ricketts, bridling. "He could no more relish a pleasure without a vice, than he could dine without caviare."

"But they are be-be-betrothed," cried Purvis. "I saw a letter with an account of the ceremony. Mid-chekoff fitted up a beautiful chapel at his villa, and there was a Greek priest came sp-special from M-M-M-Moscow——"

"I thought you were going to say from the moon, sir; and it would be almost as plausible," croaked Haggerstone.

"I saw the letter. It wasn't shown to me, but I saw it; and it was that woman from Breslau gave her away."

"What! old Madame Heidendorf? She has assisted at a great many similar ceremonies before, sir."

"It was the emperor sent her on purpose," cried Purvis, very angry at the disparagement of his history.

"In this unbelieving age, sir, I must say that your fresh innocence is charming; but permit me to tell you that I know old Caroline Meersburg—she was sister of the fellow that stole the Archduke Michael's dress-sword at the Court ball given for his birthday. I have known her five-and-thirty years. You must have met her, madam, at Lubetskoy's, when he was minister at Naples, the year after the battle of Marengo."

"I was wearing trousers with frills to them, and hunting butterflies at that time," said Mrs. Ricketts, with a great effort at a smile.

"I haven't a doubt of it, madam." And then muttered to himself, "And if childishness mean youth, she will enjoy a perpetual spring!"

"The ceremony," resumed Purvis, very eager to relate his story, "was dr-droll enough; they cut off a—a—a lock of her hair, and tied it up with one of his."

"A good wig spoiled!" croaked Haggerstone.

"They then brought a b-b-b——"

"A baby, sir?"

"No, not a b-baby, a b-basin—a silver basin—and they poured water over both their hands."

"A ceremony by no means in accordance with Russian prejudices," chimed in Haggerstone. "They know far more of train-oil and bears' fat than of brown Windsor!"

"Not the higher nobility, colonel—not the people of rank," objected Mrs. Ricketts.

"There are none such, madam. I have lived in intimacy with them all, from Alexander downwards. You may dress them how you please, but the Cossack is in the blood. Raw beef and red breeches are more than instincts with them; and, except the Poles, they are the dirtiest nation of Europe."

"What you say of Polen?" asked Petrolaffsky.

"That if oil could smooth down the acrimony of politics, you ought to be a happy people yet, sir."

"And we are a great people dis minet. Haven't we Urednfrskioctsch, de best general in de world; and Krakouventkay, de greatest poet; and Vladoritski, de most distinguish pianist?"

"Keep them, sir, with all their consonants; and Heaven give you luck with them," said Haggerstone, turning away.

"On Tuesday—no, We-Wednesday next, they are to set out for St. P-P-Petersburg. And when the Emperor's leave is gr-granted, then Midchekoff is to follow; but not before."

"An de tyrant no grant de leave," said the Pole, gnashing his teeth and grasping an imaginary dagger in his wrath. "More like he send her to work in shains, wid my beautiful sisters and my faders."

"He'll have more important matters to think of soon, sir," said Haggerstone, authoritatively. "Europe is on the eve of a great convulsion. Some kings and kaisers will accept the Chiltern Hundreds before the year's out."

"Shall we be safe, colonel, here? Ought Martha and I——"

"Have no fears, madam; age commands respect, even from Huns and Croats. And were it otherwise, madam, where would you fly to? France will have her own troubles, England has the income-tax, and Germany will rake up some old grievance of the Hohenstaufen, or the Emperor Conrad, and make it a charge against Prince Metternich and the Diet! It's a very rascally world altogether, and out of Tattersall's yard I never expect to hear of honesty or good principles; and, *à propos* to nothing, let us have some piquet, count."

The table was soon got ready, and the players had just seated themselves, when the sound of carriage-wheels in the court attracted their attention.

"What can it mean, Scroope? Are you quite certain that you said I wouldn't receive to-night?"

"Yes; I told them what you b-bade me; that if the archduke called——"

"There, you needn't repeat it," broke in Mrs. Ricketts, for certain indications around Haggerstone's mouth showed the sense of ridicule that was working within him.

"I suppose, madam, you feel somewhat like poor Pauline, when she said that she was so beset with kings and kaisers she had never a moment left for good society?"

"You must say positively, Scroope, that I admit no one this evening."

"The Signor Morlache wishes to see you, madam," said a servant. And close behind him, as he spoke, followed that bland personage, bowing gracefully to each as he entered.

"Sorry—most sorry—madam, to intrude upon your presence; but the Prince Midchekoff desires to have a glance at the pictures and decorations before he goes away from Florence."

"Will you mention to him that to-morrow, in the afternoon, about five or——"

"He leaves this to-morrow morning, madam; and if you could——"

But before the Jew could finish his request the door was flung wide, and the great Midchekoff entered, with his hands in his coat-pockets, and his glass in one eye. He sauntered into the room with a most profound unconsciousness that there were people in it. Not a glance did he even bestow on the living figures of the scene, nor did a trait of his manner evince any knowledge of their presence. Ranging his eyes over the walls and the ceilings, he neither noticed the martial attitude of Haggerstone, nor the graceful undulations by which Mrs. Ricketts was, as it were, rehearsing a curtsey before him.

"Originals, but all poor things, Morlache," said the prince. And really the observation seemed as though uttered of the company rather than the pictures.

"Mrs. Ricketts has been good enough, your highness——" began the Jew.

"Give her a Napoleon," said he, listlessly, and turned away.

"My sister, Mrs. Ricketts—Mrs. M-M-Montague Ricketts," began Scroope, whose habitual timidity gave way under the extremity of provocation. And the prince turned slowly round, and surveyed the speaker and the imposing form that loomed behind him.

"Tell them that I don't mean to keep any establishment here, Morlache." And with this he strolled on, and passed into another room, while, like as in a tableau, the others stood speechless with rage and indignation.

"He took you for the housekeeper, ma'am," said Haggerstone, standing up with his back to the fire—"and a housekeeper out of place!"

"Martha, where's the general? Where is he, I say?" cried Mrs. Ricketts, furious with passion.

"He went to bed at nine," whispered Martha. "He thought, by rising early to-morrow, to finish the attack on Utrecht before night."

"You are as great a fool as himself. Scroope, come here. You must follow that Russian. You must tell him the gross rudeness——"

"I'll be ha-ha-hanged if I do. I've had enough of rows, for one winter at least. I'll not get into another sc-scrape, if I can help it."

"I'm sorry, madam, that I cannot offer you my services," said Haggerstone, "but I never meddle in a quarrel which can be made a subject of ridicule. Mr. Foglass, I'm certain, has no such scruple."

"The prince appears a very agreeable man," said the ex-consul, who, not having the slightest notion of what was passing, merely followed his instincts of praising the person of high rank.

"De shains of my enslaved country is on my hands. I'm tied like one galerien!" said Petrolaffsky, in a voice guttural with emotion.

"Your pardon once more, madam," said Morlache, slipping into the chamber, and noiselessly approaching Mrs. Ricketts's chair. "The prince will take everything—pictures, plate, china, and books. I hope to-morrow, at noon, will not inconvenience you to leave this——"

"To-morrow! Impossible, sir. Perfectly impossible."

"In that case, madam, we must make some arrangement as to rent. His highness leaves all to me, and I will endeavour to meet your wishes in every respect. Shall we say two thousand francs a month for the present?" Without waiting for any reply, he turned to the Pole, and whispered, "He'll take you back again. He wants a chasseur, to send to St. Petersburg. Come over to me in the morning, about ten. Mr. Foglass," cried he, in a loud voice, "when you write to London, will you mention that the varnish on the prince's drosky doesn't stand the cold of Russia, and that they must try some other plan with the barouche? Your brother is an ingenious fellow, and he'll hit upon something. Colonel Haggerstone, the prince didn't return your call. He says you will guess the reason when he says that he was in Palermo in a certain year you know of. I wish the honourable company good night," said he, bowing with a deference almost submissive, and backing out of the room as he spoke.

And with him we also take our leave of them. They were like the chance passengers we meet on the road of a journey, with whom we converse when near, and forget when we separate from. Were we not more interested for the actors than the scenes on which they "strut their hour," we might yet linger a few moments on the spot so bound up with our memory of Kate Dalton—the terrace where she sat, the little orangery where she loitered of a morning, the window where she read, and dreamed of that bright future, so much nearer to her grasp than she knew of! There they were all!—destined to feel new influences and know other footsteps, for she had left them for ever, and gone forth upon her "Path" in life.

CHAPTER IV.

A PACKAGE OF LETTERS.

It was a bright clear morning in May. A somewhat late spring had retarded vegetation, and the blossoming fruit-trees now added their gorgeous beauty to the warmer tints of coming summer. We are once more in Baden; but how different is it from what we saw it last. The frozen fountains now plash, and hiss, and sparkle in the sun. The trim alleys are flanked by the yellow crocus and the daffodil; the spray-like foliage of the ash is flecking the sunlight on the merry river, along whose banks the cheering sound of pleasant voices mingles with the carol of a thousand birds. The windows are open, and gay balconies are spreading, and orange-trees unfolding their sweetness to the breezy air. All is life, and motion, and joy, for the winter is past, and nothing remains of it save the snow-peaks on some distant mountains, and even they are glowing in brilliant contrast with the deep blue sky beyond them.

Lovely as the valley is in summer or autumn, it is only in spring its perfect beauty appears. The sudden burst of vegetation—the rapid transition from the frost-bound durance of winter to the life and lightness of the young season, have a most exciting and exhilarating effect. This seemed conspicuous enough in the inhabitants as they chatted merrily in the streets, or met each other with pleasant greetings. It was the hour of the post arriving, and around the little window of the office were gathered the chief celebrities of the village—the principal hotel-keepers, curious to learn what tidings their correspondents gave of the prospects of the coming summer. Everything appeared to smile on that happy moment, for as the various letters were opened, each had some good news to tell his neighbours—now of some great English lord, now of some Hungarian magnate or Russian prince that was to make Baden his residence for the summer. "The Cour de Bade is all taken," said one; "There will not be a room free in all the Adler;" "The Swan must refuse the Queen of Naples"—such were the rumours that fell from lip to lip as in hearty congratulation they talked over their good fortune.

One figure only of the assembled group seemed excepted from the general joy. He was a large elderly man, who, in a patched and threadbare surtout, with a coarse scarlet muffler round his throat, appeared either distrustful of the mild season or unprovided with any change of costume to enjoy it. Seated on a stone bench in front of the window of the post-office, with an arm on each knee, and his head bent heavily forward, he never seemed to notice what went forward, nor hear one syllable of the joyous recognitions about him.

The crowd at last dispersed, the happy recipients of good news were turning homewards, and only one or two still lingered around the spot, when the old man arose and approached the window. There was something almost of shame in the way he slouched his hat over his eyes as he drew nigh and knocked timidly at the closed pane.

His summons was unheard, and yet for some time he did not repeat it—perhaps he loved better to feed his hope even these short few moments than again fall back into the dark gloom of his despair! At last, and with a deep, hollow sigh, he tapped again.

"Have you anything for the name of Dalton—Peter Dalton?" asked he, in a voice wherein scarcely an accent revealed the once high-hearted nature.

"Nothing," was the curt rejoinder. And the window was slammed to with impatience.

He grasped the iron railing with a convulsive grip, as though a sudden pang had shot through him, and then, by a great effort, he drew himself up to his full height; his pale and haggard face grew paler as he turned it upwards, and his bloodless lips trembled as they muttered some indistinct syllables; then turning about, he brushed abruptly past the few who stood around, and walked away.

He had not gone many paces when a boy overtook him, saying, "Come back, sir; the postmaster has two letters for you."

Dalton looked stealthily at either side, to be sure that the speech was addressed to him, and, with a fierceness that startled the boy, said, "You're certain they're for me?"

"Yes, yes; all right—here they are," cried the postmaster from the window. "One, a soldier's letter from Munich, and free. The other is a heavier packet, and costs four florins and twelve kreutzers."

"I must be satisfied with this one, then," said Dalton, "till I go back for money. I brought no change out with me."

"No matter: you can send it," said the other.

"Maybe it's not so easy as you think," muttered Dalton to himself; while he added, aloud, "Very well, I'll do so, and thank you." And he clutched the two letters, and pressed them to his bosom.

With hurried steps he now paced homewards, but, stopping at every instant, he drew forth the packets to gaze at them, and be certain that no self-deception was over him, and that his possession was real and tangible. His gait grew more firm as he went, and his tread, as he mounted the stairs, sounded assured and steady.

"You have a letter, father dearest," cried Nelly, as she flung wide the door. "I saw you crossing the Platz, and I know, from your walk, that you've got one."

"No, but better, Nelly—I've two. That's from Frank;

and here's Kate's, and a bulky one—four florins twelve—devil a less."

"Oh, give it to me! Let me hear of her—let me feel beside her once again!" cried Nelly. And with bursting eagerness she tore open the envelope, from which two or three sealed notes fell out. "This is from Lady Hester," said she; "and this a hand I do not know, but addressed to you; and here are bills or money-orders for a large sum. What can all this mean?"

"Can't you read what she says?" said Dalton, reddening, and suddenly remembering that Nelly was not aware of his having written to Kate. "Give it to me; I'll read it myself." And he snatched the letter from her fingers. "There's Frank's for you."

"Oh, father, father!" cried Nelly, in a burst of grief, as she tore open Lady Hester's letter; "it is as I feared. Kate is about to be married—if she be not already married."

"Without my leave—without asking my consent!" cried Dalton, passionately. "Am I nobody at all? Am I the head of the family, or am I not? Is this the way to treat her father? May I never see light, if I won't have him 'out,' if he was a Prince of the Blood! Oh, the ungrateful girl! Leave off crying there, and tell me all about it. Read me her own letter, I say—if God will give me patience to listen to it."

With a bosom almost bursting, and a lip quivering with emotion, Ellen began,—

"La Rocca, Lake of Como.

"Dearest Father and Sister,—Oh that I could throw myself at your feet, and pour out all that my heart is full of—tell you what I feel, and hope, and fear, and ask your counsel and your blessing. I know not if the last few days be real; my poor head is turning amid the scenes I've passed through and the emotions I have felt. I had no friend but Lady Hester—no adviser but she! She has been a mother to me—not as you would have been, Nelly—not to warn and restrain, when perhaps both were needed, but to encourage and feed my hopes. I yielded to her counsels——"

"I don't understand one word of this," cried Dalton, impatiently. "What did she do ?"

Nelly's eyes ran rapidly over the lines without speaking, and then in a low but distinct voice, she said,—

"It is as I said; she is betrothed to this great Russian prince."

"That fellow, they say, owns half Moscow. Fogles told us about him."

"Prince Midchekoff."

"That's the name. Well, it's a fine match—there's no denying it. How did it come about? and why didn't he come here and ask my consent? What's the meaning of doing it all in this hurry?"

"The marriage can only take place in St. Petersburg, and in presence of the Emperor; and she is merely betrothed at present, to enable her to accompany the lady, Madame de Heidendorf, to Russia, where the prince will follow in a few weeks."

"That bangs Banagher! Why couldn't they get a priest where they are? Be gorra! they've scruples about everything but *me!* *I*'m the only one that's not considered! What the devil is the Emperor to her—sure *he* isn't her father? Well, well, go on."

"She would seem to have yielded to persuasion," said Nelly, feelingly. "The prince, with all his greatness, appears not to have won her heart. See how she dwells upon his immense wealth and the splendour of his position."

"Let us hear about that," cried Dalton, eagerly.

"My heart is nigh to bursting when I think of you and dearest Nelly living with me, in all the enjoyment that riches can bestow, nothing denied you that you can fancy, and free to indulge every taste and every wish. To know that I can at last repay, in some sort, all your affection—that poor worthless Kate can minister to your pleasure and your comfort—would make me dare a rasher destiny than this. And he is so generous, Nelly. The whole of yesterday is like a page from the 'Arabian Nights,' as I sat surrounded with gorgeous articles of gold and gems—diamonds such as a queen might wear, and rubies larger than the glass-drops I used to deck my hair with long ago!

And yet they tell me I have seen nothing as yet, and that the treasures of the Vladovitch Palace I hear of at every moment are greater than most royal houses. Lady Hester is kinder than ever, and the Heindendorf also; but she is cold and reserved—too stately for my taste—and I cannot overcome my awe of her. Is not this like a confession of my unfitness for the station I am to occupy?—are not these signs of inferiority? How little Hans would stare at the objects of taste and art by which I am surrounded, and of which I never tire in admiring.

"There have been great changes in this family since I wrote, and some mysterious circumstance is now hanging over them; but Lady Hester has not told me anything, nor do I care to repeat rumours which reach me through others. I only know that Sir Stafford is about to proceed to England as soon as Captain Onslow's health will permit; he, poor fellow, met with an accident on the day we left Florence, and my maid, who sat in the rumble, saw the mishap without knowing or suspecting the victim! I have done everything to obtain leave to visit you before I set out, or even to see you on my way; but Madame de Heidendorf is absolute, and she has so much important business in hand—such deep political affairs to transact at Vienna and Dresden—that I find it is impossible.

"The prince has promised to write at once about Frank. He says it will be better to obtain his promotion in the Austrian service before he enters the Russian, and that this shall take place immediately. I could see that on this point he was acutely alive to the fact of our humble position; but he knows from Lady Hester all about our family, and that the Daltons acknowledge nothing superior to them in birth. This, however, is always a difficulty to a foreigner; they have no idea of untitled nobility; and I saw his chagrin the other day when I told him to address papa as plain Monsieur. Since yesterday morning I am called princess; and I cannot conceal from you the throb of delight the sound still gives me! I often stop to ask myself if this be all a dream, and shall I wake beside the fire and see dearest Nelly bending over some little group, and Hans with wondering eyes staring over her shoulders.

"The prince only intends to spend one winter in Russia.

Madame de Heidendorf says that he will be named Ambassador at Paris; but I hope and trust not: I feel too acutely my inferiority for such a position. This she laughs at, and merely says, 'Nous verrons.' Of course, wherever I am, you will both be with me; meanwhile, what would you wish to do? I told Monsieur Rubion, the prince's secretary, that I wanted money, and he gave me these bills, so he called them, on Baden and Carlsruhe, as easily negotiable in that neighbourhood; pray, say if they be serviceable. The prince intends to visit you at Baden; and I suppose you will like to see him. His manners are perfect, and except a degree of constraint in first acquaintance, he is generally thought very agreeable. Such preparations as they are making for my journey, you'd fancy I was a queen at the very least. All my *trousseau* is to come from Paris direct; and up to this I have merely what Madame de H. calls the strictly 'indispensable;' which, shall I own? contrives to fill two large fourgons and a heavy travelling carriage. Nina is in a perfect ecstasy at everything, and is eternally 'draping' me in Brussels lace and Chantilly; so, that, even while I write, these flimsy tissues are floating around me; while caskets of jewels and precious gems dazzle my eyes wherever I turn them.

"The whole is like a gorgeous vision; would that it might remain ever thus, for I almost tremble to take a step further. Are these unworthy fears? I hope they are."

Nelly paused, and laid down the letter on her knee.

"Well, may I never see grace, if that letter isn't enough to confuse a bench of bishops!" cried Dalton. "She's marrying the first man in Europe—be the other who he will—and she has as many crotchets and misgivings about it as if it was little Hans, there, below! And he a prince! a real prince!—devil a doubt of it—that scatters the money about like chaff! Here's an order at sight for nine hundred gulden; and here's a bill at ten days—a nice date—for fourteen hundred and eighty-six Prussian dollars; and this is nearly as much more. Kate, my beauty, I knew you'd do it! I never looked at you, in your old clogs and the worsted cloak, that I didn't think of the day

I'd see you in satin and velvet! Faix! it's the best bottle of claret in the Adler I'll drink your health in this day! Nelly, who will we ask in to dinner?"

"Don't you think, papa, it were better we should not speak of this——"

"Why, better? Are we ashamed of it?"

"I mean, more prudent as regards ourselves, and more respectful to the prince."

"Respectful—to my son-in-law!—that's 'more of it.' Upon my conscience I'll have to go to school again in my old days. I know nothing of life at all, at all! Respect, indeed!"

"I would but suggest, papa, that for Kate's sake——"

"There—there—don't provoke me. I never set my heart on a thing yet—big or little—that I wasn't met with a caution about this, or a warning about that, till at last I got so tutored, and corrected, and trained, that, as Billy Morris used to say at whist, 'I dread a good hand more than a bad one.'"

"Far be it from me, dearest father," said Nelly, smiling, "to throw a shadow over a bright moment. If it will give you pleasure——"

"Sure I said it would—sure I told you 'tis what I'd like. A fine dinner at the 'Schwan'—four gulden a head, without wine—a dozen of champagne in ice—hock for them that can drink it—and port and Lafitte for Peter Dalton and men of his own sentiments. There's the programme, Nelly, and you'll see if I can't fill up the details."

"Well, but we have yet much to do; here are several letters—here is Frank's. Let us learn how the dear fellow fares."

Dalton sat down without speaking: there was, indeed, more of resignation than curiosity in his features, as he crossed his arms and listened.

"DEAREST NELLY,—I only heard a few days ago that my last two letters had been stopped; they were not, as they should have been, submitted to my captain to read, and hence they were arrested and suppressed. This goes by a private hand—a friend of mine—a pedlar from Donaueschingen——"

"A what?—a pedlar is it?" broke in Dalton, angrily.

"Yes, papa; remember that poor Frank is still in the ranks."

"Well, God give me patience with you all!" burst out the old man, in a torrent of passion. "Does he know that he's a Dalton?—does he feel blood in his veins? Why the blazes must he seek out a thieving blaguard with a pack full of damaged cambric to make a friend of? Is this the way the family's getting up in the world?"

"Adolf Brawer, by name," read on Nelly, in a low and subdued voice. "You will be surprised when I tell you that I owe all his kindness and good-nature to you—yes, to your own dear self. On his way through the Tyrol he had bought two wooden statuettes—one a young soldier asleep beside a well; the other a girl leaning from a window to hear the bugles of a departing regiment. Can you guess whose they were? And when he came to know that I was the brother of the little N. D. that was sculptured, half-hid in a corner, and that I was the original of the tired, wayworn recruit on the roadside, I thought he would have cried with enthusiasm."

"Didn't I often say it?" broke in Dalton, as, wringing his hands in despair, he paced the room with hasty strides. "Didn't I warn you a thousand times about them blasted images, and tell you that, sooner or later, it would get about who made them? Didn't I caution you about the disgrace you'd bring on us? The fear of this was over me this many a day. I had it like a dream on my mind, and I used to say to myself, 'It will all come out yet.'"

Nelly covered her face with her apron as these bitter words were spoken; but not a syllable, nor a sigh, did she reply to them; still the frail garment shook with an emotion that showed how intensely she suffered.

"A Virgin sold here—an Angel Gabriel there; now it was Hamlet—another time Goötz with the iron hand. All the balderdash that ever came into your head scattered over the world to bring shame on us! And then to think of Kate!"

"Yes, dearest father, do think of her," cried Nelly, passionately; "she is, indeed, an honour and a credit to you."

"And so might you have been too, Nelly," rejoined he, half sorry for his burst of anger. "I'm sure I never made any difference between you. I treated you all alike, God knows." And truly, if an indiscriminating selfishness could plead for him, the apology was admirable.

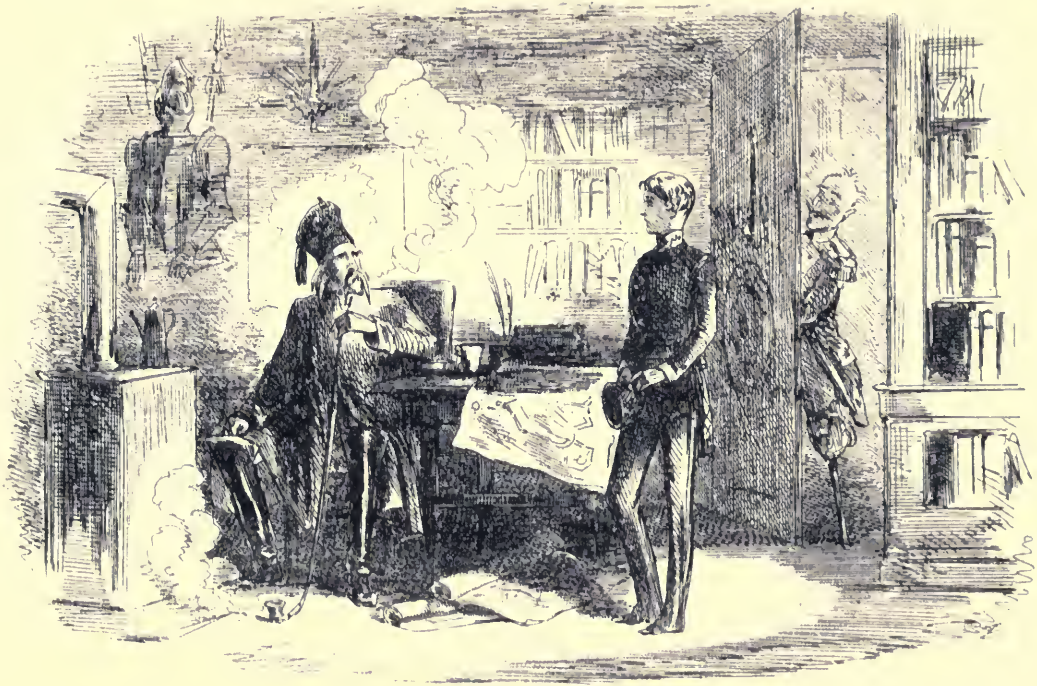
"Yes, papa; but nature was less generous," said Nelly, smiling through her tears; and she again turned to the letter before her. As if fearful to revive the unhappy discussion, she passed rapidly over Frank's account of his friend's ecstasy, nor did she read aloud till she came to the boy's narrative of his own fortunes.

"You ask me about Count Stephen, and the answer is a short one. I have seen him only once. Our battalion, which was stationed at Laybach, only arrived in Vienna about three weeks ago, but feeling it a duty to wait on our relative, I obtained leave one evening to go and pay my respects. Adolf, who knew of my connection with the field-marshal, had lent me two hundred florins; and this, too, I was anxious to pay off—another reason for this visit.

"Well, I dressed myself in my best cadet cloth and silk sword-knot, Nelly—none of your 'commissaire' toggery, but all fine and smart-looking, as a gentleman-cadet ought to be—and then calling a fiacre, I ordered the man to drive to the 'Koertnor Thor,' to the Field-Marshal von Auersberg's quarters. I'm not sure if I didn't say to my uncle's. Away we went gaily, and soon drew up in an old-fashioned courtyard, from which a great stair led up four stories high, at the top of which the 'Feld'—so they called him—resided. This was somewhat of a come-down to my high-flown expectations, but nothing to what I felt as the door was opened by an old Jäger with one leg, instead of, as I looked for, a lacquey in a grand livery.

"'What is't, cadet?' said he, in a tone of the coolest familiarity.

"'The Field-Marshal von Auersberg lives here?' said I.



Frank visits his Uncle.

"He nodded.

"'I wish to see him.

"'He shook his head gravely, and scanning me from head to foot, said, 'Not at this hour, cadet—not at this hour.'

"'Let him see this card,' said I, giving one with my name. 'I'm certain he'll receive me.'

"I believe if I had presented a pistol at him, the old fellow would have been less startled, as he exclaimed, 'A cadet with a visiting card! This would serve you little with the Feld, younker,' cried he, handing it back to me; 'he likes to see a soldier a soldier.'

"'Tell him my name, then,' said I, angrily; 'say that his grand-nephew, Frank Dalton, has been standing at his door in full parley with a servant for ten minutes.'

"The announcement created little of the astonishment I calculated on, and the old soldier merely replied, 'All under field-officer's rank come before eight of a morning. You cannot expect to have the privilege of an archduke.' He was about to close the door in my face as he spoke, but I placed my shoulder against it and forced it back, thus securing an entrance within the forbidden precincts.

"'Right about, quick march!' cried he, pointing to the door, while his whole frame trembled with passion.

"'Not till you have delivered my message,' said I, calmly.

"'Then Bey'm Blitzen I will deliver it, and see how you'll like it,' cried he, as he stumped away down a passage and entered a room at the end of it. I could soon hear the sound of voices, and for the moment I was almost determined to beat a retreat, when suddenly the old Jäger came out and beckoned me forward. There was a grin of most diabolical delight on the old fellow's features as I passed into the room and closed the door behind me.

"As well as I could see in the imperfect light, for it was after sunset, the apartment was large and low-ceilinged, with bookshelves round the walls, and stands for weapons and military equipments here and there through it. At the stove, and busily engaged in watching a coffee-pot, sat the Feld himself, a loose grey overcoat covering his figure, and concealing all of him but two immense jack-boots that peeped out beneath. He wore a Mütze, a kind of Hungarian cap, and a long pipe depended from his mouth, the bowl resting on the carpet. The most conspicuous feature of all was, however, his enormous moustache, which, white as snow, touched his collar-bone at either side.

"He never spoke a word as I entered, but stared at me steadfastly and sternly for full three or four minutes. Half abashed by this scrutiny, and indignant besides at the reception, I was about to advance towards him, when he called out, as if on parade, 'Halt! What regiment, cadet?'

"'Franz Carl Infantry, third battalion,' said I, instantly saluting with my hand.

"'Your name?'

"'Frank Dalton.'

"'Your business?'

"'To visit my grand-uncle, the Field-Marshal von Auersberg.'

"'And is it thus, younker,' cried he, rising, and drawing himself up to his full height, 'that you dare to present yourself before a Feldzeugmeister of the Imperial Army? Have they not taught you even the commonest rules of discipline? Have they left you in the native barbarism of your own savage country, that you dare, against my orders, present yourself before me?'

"'I thought the claim of kindred——' began I.

"'What know I of kindred, sirrah? What have kith and kin availed *me?* I have stood alone in the world. It was not to kindred I owed my life on the field of Rosbach; nor was it a relative stanched my bleeding wounds at Wagram!'

"'The name of Dalton——'

"'I have won a prouder one, sir, and would not be reminded by you from what I've started. Where's your character-certificate?'

"'I have not brought it with me, Herr General. I scarcely thought it would be the first question my father's uncle would put to me.'

"'There was prudence in the omission, too, sir,' said he, not heeding my remark. 'But I have it here.' And he drew from a portfolio on the table a small slip of paper, and read: '" Cadet Dalton, second company of the third battalion, Franz Carl Regiment.—Smart on service, and quick in discipline, but forward and petulant with those above him in rank. Disposed to pride himself on birth and fortune, and not sufficiently submissive to orders. Twice in arrest, once, Kurzgeschlossen." A creditable character, sir! Twice in arrest and once in irons! And with this you claim kindred with a count of the empire, and an imperial field-marshal! On the fifth of last month you entertained a party at dinner at the Wilde Man—most of them men of high rank and large fortune. On the eighteenth you drove through Maria Tell with a team of four horses, and passed the drawbridge and the moat in full gallop. So late as Wednesday last you hoisted a green flag on the steeple of the village church, on pretence of honouring your father's birthday. I know each incident of your career, sir, and have watched you with shame and regret. Tell your father, when you write to him, that all the favour of my august master would not endure the test of two such protégés. And now, back to your quarters.'

"He motioned me to retire with a gesture, and I fell back, almost glad at any cost to escape. I had just reached the stair, when the Jäger called me back to his presence.

"'Art an only son?' asked the count, for the first time addressing me in the second person.

"I bowed.

"'And hast three sisters?'

"'Two, Herr General.'

"'Older, or younger than thyself?'

"'Both older, sir.'

"'How have they been brought up? Have they learned thrift and housecraft, or are they wasteful and reckless, as their native country and their name would bespeak them?'

"'Our humble fortune is the best answer to that question, sir.'

"'It is not, sirrah!' cried he, angrily. 'The spendthrift habit survives every remnant of the state that gave it birth, and the beggar can be as improvident as the prince. Go; thou hast as much to learn of the world as of thy duty. Head erect, sir; shoulders back; the right thumb more forwards. If the rest of the battalion be like thee, I'll give them some work on the Prater ere long.'

"A haughty wave of his hand now finished our interview, and, once outside the door, I descended the stairs, a whole flight at every bound, in terror lest anything should induce him to recall me.

"And this is uncle Stephen, Nelly—this the great protector we used to build our hopes upon, and flatter ourselves would be a second father to us!

"When I came out into the street, I knew not which way to turn. I dreaded the very sight of a comrade, lest he should ask me about our meeting, what pocket-money he had given me, and how soon I should be an officer. It was only when I saw Adolf coming towards me that I remembered all about my debt to him, of which I had not spoken one word to my uncle. I ought to have told him so, frankly. Yes, Nelly, I can hear the murmured displeasure with which you read my confession, 'that I couldn't do it.' I was unequal to the effort, and could not bring myself to destroy that whole fabric of fictitious interest in which I had wrapped myself. What would Adolf have thought of me when I said, I have neither wealth, nor station, nor prospect—as humble a soldier as the sentry you see yonder? What would become of that romance of life in which we have so often spent hours revelling in a brilliant future, every incident of which grew up in our united fancies, and seemed to assume reality as we discussed it? Where—oh, Nelly! to you I must reveal all—every weakness, every littleness of my nature—where would be the homage of respect the poor Bursche was wont to show the nephew of a field-marshal? No, it was above my strength; and so I took his arm, and talked away heedlessly about our meeting, avoiding, where I could, all mention of my uncle, and but jocularly affecting to think him an original, whose strange, old-fashioned manners almost concealed the strong traits of family affection.

"'What of thy promotion, Frank?' asked Adolf.

"'It will come in its own good time,' said I carelessly. 'Nothing causes more dissatisfaction than the rapid advancement of cadets of noble family.'

"'But they could make thee a corporal, at least?'

"I laughed scornfully at the remark, and merely said, 'They may skip over the whole sous-officier grade, and only remember me when I'm to be made a lieutenant.'

"'Thou hast grown haughtier, Frank,' said he, half reproachfully, 'since thy meeting with the "Feld." Mayhap in a day or two thou wilt not like to be seen in company with a "Wander-Bursche"?'

"I was bursting to throw my arms round his neck, and say, 'Never, whatever fortune have in store for me; thy friendship is like a brother's, and can never be forgotten;' but Pride—yes, Nelly, the cursed pride against which you used to warn me—sealed my lips; and when I spoke, it was something so cold, so meaningless, and so unworthy that he left me. I know not how! No sooner was I alone, Nelly, than I burst into tears. I cried for very shame; and if agony could expiate my fault, mine should have done so. What humiliation before my friend could equal that I now felt before my own heart! I thought of all your teachings, dearest Nelly; of the lessons you gave me over and over against this besetting sin of my nature! I thought of our home, where poor Hanserl was treated by us as a friend! I thought of our last parting, and the words you spoke to me in warning against this very pride, ignoble and mean as it is; and, oh! what would I have given to have thrown myself into Adolf's arms, and told him everything! I have never seen him since; he wrote to me a few lines, saying that he should pass through Baden on his way to Frankfort, and offering to carry a letter for me; but not once did he allude to my debt, nor was there the slightest hint of its existence. On this I wrote an acknowledgment of the loan, and a pressing entreaty that he would come and see me; but he pretended one thing and another; affected engagements at the only hours I was free; and at last abruptly sent for my letter just when I was writing it. I had much more to tell you, Nelly, of myself, of the service, and of my daily life here; but my thoughts are now disturbed and scattered; and I feel, too, how your shame for my short-coming will take away interest from what I say. You, Nelly, will have courage to be just: tell him all that I have been weak enough to conceal; let him know what suffering my unworthy shame has cost me; and, above all, that I am not ungrateful.

"It seems like a dream all that you tell me of Kate. Is she still in Italy, and where? Would she write to me? I am ashamed to ask the question of herself. They spoke of our brigade being sent to Lombardy; but even there I might be far away from her; and if near, in the very same city, our stations would separate us still more widely. Oh, Nelly! is it worth all the success ever ambition the most successful won, thus to tear up the ties of family, and make brothers and sisters strangers? Would that I were back again with you, and dearest Kate too! I see no future here; the dull round of daily discipline, teaching nothing but obedience, shuts out speculation and hope! Where are the glorious enterprises, the splendid chances I often dreamed of? My happiest moments now are recalling the past; the long winter evenings beside the hearth, while Hans was reading out to us. There are rumours of great changes in the world of Europe; but to us they are only the thunderings of a distant storm, to break out in what quarter we know not. Oh, Nelly! if it should lead to war! if some glorious struggle were to break in upon this sluggish apathy!

"Adolf has sent again for this letter, so I must close it. He will not, he says, pass through Baden, but will post this in Munich—so good-bye, dearest sister. Tell poor papa all that you dare to tell of me, and farewell.

"Frank Dalton.

"When you write, it must be under cover to the 'Herr Hauptman von Gauss, 2ten Compagnie, 3 Linien Bataillon, Franz Carl Infanterie.' Don't forget this long address, nor to add a line to the captain himself, who is a good-looking fellow, but somewhat conceited.

"I have just heard old Auersberg is to have a command again. I'm heartily sorry for it. So much for family influence!"

If the reader's patience has lasted though this long letter of Frank's, it was more than Peter Dalton's did. For what between his ecstasy at Kate's good fortune, his own rambling speculations on all that should follow from it, and, above all, what from the slurring monotonous tone in which Nelly passed over such portions as she did not wish him to hear, he grew gradually more abstracted and dreamy, and at last fell off into a deep and most happy slumber. Not a syllable did he hear of the old Feld's reception of Frank, nor did he even awake as little Hans stumped into the room, with a staff in either hand, aids that, since his accident, he could never dispense with.

"I heard that you had letters, fräulein," said he; "do they bring good tidings?"

"Some would call them so, Hanserl," said she, with a sigh. "Kate is about to be married."

Hanserl made no reply, but sat slowly down, and crossed his arms before him.

"The great Russian Prince Midchekoff, of whom you may have heard."

"I have seen him, fräulein; he was here in Baden, three years ago."

"Oh, then, tell me, Hanserl, what is he like? Is he young and frank-looking? Seems he one that should have won a maiden's heart so suddenly, that—that——"

"No, not that she couldn't have written to her sister and asked for counsel, fräulein," said Hans, continuing her sentence. "The prince is a cold, austere man, proud to his equals, I believe, but familiar enough to such as me. I remember how he asked me of my life, where I came from, and how I lived. He seemed curious to hear about the train of thoughts suggested by living amid objects of such childish interest, and asked me, 'If I did not often fancy that this mock world around me was the real one?' 'You are right, Herr Printz,' said I; 'but, after all, here at least we are equals.' 'How so?' said he. 'That *your* real world is as great a mockery as mine.' 'Thou are right, dwarf,' said he, thoughtfully, and fell a-musing.

He should not have called me dwarf, for men know me as Hans Roëckle—and this is your sister's husband!"

"Is he mild and gentle-mannered?" asked Nelly, eagerly.

"The great are always so, so far as I have seen; none but base metal rings loudly, maiden. It is part of their pride to counterfeit humility."

"And his features, Hans?"

"Like one of those portraits in the gallery at Würtzburg. One who had passions and a temper for a feudal age, and was condemned to the slavery of our civilization."

"He is much older than Kate?" asked she again.

"I have seen too few like him even to guess at his age; besides, men of his stamp begin life with old temperaments, and time wears them but little."

"Oh, Hanserl, this seems not to promise well. Kate's own nature is frank, generous, and impulsive; how will it consort with the cold traits of his?"

"She marries not for happiness, but for ambition, maiden. They who ascend the mountain-top to look down upon the scene below them, must not expect the sheltering softness of the valley at their feet. The Fräulein Kate is beautiful, and she would have the homage that is paid to beauty. She has chosen her road in life; let us at least hope she knows how to tread it!"

There was a tone of almost sternness in Hanserl's manner that Nelly well knew boded deep and intense feeling, and she forebore to question him further for some time.

"You will leave this, then, fräulein?" said he at last; "you will quit the humble valley for the great world?"

"I know not, Hanserl, what my father may decide. Kate speaks of our joining her in Russia; but the long journey in his infirm state, not to speak of other reasons, may prevent this. Shall I tell you of Frank? Here is a long letter from him." And, almost without waiting for his reply, she read out the greater portion of the epistle.

"I like the old Feld!" cried Hans, enthusiastically. "He would teach the boy submission, and self-reliance too—lessons that, however wide apart they seem, go ever hand in hand—an old warrior that has trained his bold nature to habits of obedience in many a year of trial and injustice, unfriended and alone, with nothing but his stout heart and good sword to sustain him. I like that Feld, and would gladly pledge him in a glass of Steinberger!"

"And you shall, my little man," said Dalton, waking up, and catching the last words of Hanserl's speech. "The old count was kind to Frank, and I'll drink his health this night, with all the honours. Read him the letter, Nelly. Show him how old Stephen received the boy. That's blood for you!—a true Dalton!"

Hanserl stared from father to daughter, and back again, without speaking; while Nelly, blushing deeply, held down her head, without a word.

"His letter to us was dry enough. But what matter for that? He never wrote a line—maybe, didn't speak a word of English for upwards of forty years. You can't expect a man to have the 'elegant correspondent' at his fingers' ends after that space of time. But the heart!—that's the main point, Hans. The heart is in the right place. Read that bit over again, Nelly; I forget the words he said."

"Oh no, papa. Hans has just heard it all, from beginning to end; and you know we have so much to do. Here's Lady Hester's note, and here's one from the prince, still unopened."

"Ay, to be sure. I'm certain you'll excuse me, Hans," said Dalton, putting on his spectacles, while he assumed a manner of condescending urbanity very puzzling to the poor dwarf. "Why, Nelly dear, this is French. Give me that note of Lady Hester's, and do you take this. Oh! by my conscience, I'm no better off now! The devil such writing as this ever I seen! It's all 'm's' and 'w's' every bit of it. You'll keep them both for the evening, my dear. Hans will dine with us, and I'll go out to look for a bit of fish, and see if I can find another pleasant fellow to round off the table with us. God be with old Kilmurray M'Mahon, where I could have had twenty as easy as two, and each of them a good warrant for four bottles besides! Isn't it a droll world?" muttered he, as he took down his hat and descended the stairs. "A good dinner, and only a cripple for company! Faix! I'm like the chap in the Bible, that had to ask the beggars and the blaguards, when he couldn't get better." And with this very wise reflection, Peter Dalton hummed a jig to himself as he took his way to the fish-market.

CHAPTER V.

A HAPPY DAY FOR PETER DALTON.

A YOUTHFUL heir never experienced a more glorious burst of delight on the morning of his twenty-first birthday, than did Peter Dalton feel as he sauntered down the principal street of Baden. It was with a step almost elastic, and his head high, that he went along; not humbly returning the "Good day" of the bowing shopkeeper, but condescendingly calling his worthy creditors—for such nearly all of them were—by their Christian names, he gave them to believe that he was still, as ever, their kind and generous patron!

There was scarcely a shop or a stall he did not linger beside for a minute or two. Everywhere there was something not only which he liked, but actually needed. Never did wants accumulate so rapidly! With a comprehensive grasp they extended to every branch of trade and merchandize,—ranging from jewellery to gin, and taking in all, from fur slippers to sausages.

His first visit was to Abel Krans, the banker and money-lender—a little den, which often before he had entered with a craven heart and a sinking spirit, for Abel was a shrewd old Israelite, and seemed to read the very schedule of a man's debts, in the wrinkles around his mouth. Dalton now unbarred the half door and stalked in, as if he would carry the place by storm.

The man of money was munching his breakfast of hard eggs and black bread—the regulation full diet of misers in all Germany—when Peter cavalierly touched his hat, and sat down. Not a word did Abel speak. No courtesies about the season or the weather, the funds or the money-market, were worth bestowing on so poor a client, and so he ate on, scarcely deigning even a glance towards him.

"When you've done with the garlic, old boy, I've some work for you," said Dalton, crossing his arms pretentiously.

"But what if I do not accept your work? What, if I tell you that we shall have no more dealings together? The two last bills——"

"They'll be paid, Abel—they'll be paid. Don't put yourself in a passion. Times is improving—Ireland's looking up, man."

"I think she is," muttered the Jew, insolently; "she is looking up like the beggar that asks for alms yonder."

"Tear and ages!" cried Dalton, with a stroke of his fist upon the table that made every wooden bowl of gold and silver coin jump and ring again—"tear and ages! take care what you say. By the soul in my body, if you say a syllable against the old country, I'll smash every stick in the place, and your own bones besides! Ye miserable ould heathen! that hasn't a thought above sweating a guinea—how dare you do it?"

"Why do you come into my counting-house to insult me, saar? Why you come where no one ask you?"

"Is it waiting for an invitation I'd be, Abel? is it expecting a card with ould Kraus's compliments?" said Dalton, laughing. "Sure, isn't the place open like the fish-market, or the ball-room, or the chapel, or any place of diversion? There, now; keep your temper, old boy. I tell ye, there's luck before ye! What d'ye think of that?" And, as he spoke, he drew forth one of the bills, and handed it across the counter; and then, after gloating as it were over the changed expression of the Jew's features, he handed a second, and a third.

"These are good papers, Herr von Dalton; no better!

The exchange, too, is in your favour; we are giving — let me see — ten and three-eighths 'Convenzions-Gelt.'"

"To the devil I fling your three-eighths!" cried Dalton. "I never forgot the old song at school that says, 'Fractions drives me mad.'"

"Ah, always droll,—always merry!" cackled out Abel. "How will you have these moneys?"

"In a bag,—a good strong canvas-bag!"

"Yes, to be sure, in a bag; but I was asking how you'd have them. I mean, in what coin,—in what for 'Gelt.'"

"Oh, that's it!" cried Dalton. "Well, give me a little of everything. Let me have 'Louis' to spend, and 'Groschen' to give the beggars. Bank-notes, too, I like; one feels no regretting parting with the dirty paper, that neither jingles nor shines: and a few crown pieces, Abel; the ring of them on a table is like a brass band!"

"So you shall—so you shall, Herr von Dalton. Ha! ha! ha! You are the only man ever make me laugh!"

"By my conscience, then, it's more than you deserve, Abel; for you've very often nearly made *me* cry," said Dalton, with a little sigh over the past, as he recalled it to his memory.

The Jew did not either heed or hear the remark; for, having put away the remnant of his frugal breakfast, he now began a very intricate series of calculations respecting interest, and exchange, and commission, at which poor Dalton gazed in a most complete mystification.

"Fourteen hundred and sixty-three, at ten three-eighths —less cost of commission; I will not charge you the one per cent——."

"Charge all that's fair, and no favour, old boy."

"I mean that I will not treat the Herr von Dalton like a stranger——"

"I was going to say, treat me like a Christian," said Dalton, laughing; "but maybe that's the most expensive thing going."

"Always droll,—always have his jest," cackled Abel. "Now there's an agio on gold, you pay five kreutzers for every Louis."

"By George! I'll take a ship-load of them at the same price."

"Ha! I mean you pay that over the value," said the Jew.

"Faix! I often promised to pay more," said Dalton, sighing; "and what's worse, on stamped paper too!"

As the Jew grew deeper in his figures, Dalton rambled on about Ireland and her prospects, for he wished it to be supposed that his present affluence was the long-expected remittance from his estates. "We'll get right yet," muttered he, "if they'll only give us time; but ye see, this is the way it is: we're like an overloaded beast that can't pull his cart through the mud, and then the English comes up, and thrashes us. By course, we get weaker and weaker—licking and abusing never made any one strong yet. At last down we come on our knees with a smash. Well, ye'd think, then, that anybody with a grain of sense would say, 'Take some of the load off the poor devil's back—ease him a bit tell he gets strength.' Nothing of the kind. All they do is to tell us that we ought to be ashamed of ourselves for falling—that every other people was doing well but ourselves—that it's a way we have of lying down, just to get somebody to pick us up, and such like. And the blaguard newspapers raises the cry against us, and devil a thief, or a housebreaker, or a highway robber they take, that they don't put him down in the police reports as a 'hulking Irishman,' or a 'native of the Emerald Isle.' 'Paddy Fitzsimons, or Peter O'Shea, was brought up this mornin' for cutting off his wife's head with a trowel.' 'Molly Maguire was indicted for scraping her baby to death with an oyster-shell.' That's the best word they have for us! 'Ain't ye the plague of our lives?' they're always saying. 'Do ye ever give us a moment's peace?' And why the blazes don't ye send us adrift, then? Why don't ye let us take our own road? We don't want your company—faix! we never found it too agreeable. It's come to that now, that it would better be a Hottentot or a Chinese than an Irishman! Oh dear, oh dear, but we're hardly treated!"

"Will you run your eye over that paper, Herr von Dalton, and see if it be all correct?" said Abel, handing him a very complex-looking array of figures.

"'Tis little the wiser I'll be when I do," muttered Dalton to himself, as he put on his spectacles and affected to consider the statement. "Fourteen hundred and sixty-three—I wish they were pounds, but they're only florins —and two thousand eight hundred and twenty-one—five and two is seven and nine is fifteen. No seven and nine is—I wish Nelly was here. Bad luck to the multiplication-table. I used to be licked for it every day when I was a boy, and it's been a curse to me since I was a man. Seven and nine is fourteen, or thereabouts—a figure wouldn't signify much, one way or t'other. Interest at three-quarters for twenty-one days—there I'm done complete! Out of the four first rules in Gough I'm a child, and indeed, to tell the truth, I'm no great things after subtraction."

"You will perceive that I make the charges for postage, commission, and other expenses in one sum. This little claim of fifty-eight florins covers all."

"Well, and reasonable it is, that I must say," cried Dalton, who, looking at the whole as a lucky windfall, was by no means indisposed to see others share in the good fortune. "How much is coming to me, Abel?"

"Your total balance is four thousand two hundred and twenty-seven florins eight kreutzers, Müntze," said Abel, giving the sum a resonance of voice highly imposing and impressive.

"How many pounds is that now?" asked Peter.

"Something over three hundred and fifty pounds sterling, sir."

"Is it? Faith! a neat little sum. Not but I often got rid of as much of an evening at blind-hookey, with old Carters, of the 'Queen's Bays.' Ye don't know Carters? Faix! and ye'd be the very man he would know, if ye were in the same neighbourhood. I wish he was here to-day; and that reminds me that I must go over to the market, and see what's to be had. Ye don't happen to know if there's any fish to-day?"

Abel could not answer this important question, but offered to send his servant to inquire; but Dalton declining the attention, strolled out into the street, jingling his Napoleons in his pocket as he went, and feeling all the importance and self-respect that a well-filled purse confers on him who has long known the penniless straits of poverty. He owed something on every side of him; but he could bear to face his creditors now; he was neither obliged to be occupied with a letter, nor sunk in a fit of abstraction as he passed them; nay, he was even jocular and familiar, and ventured to criticize the wares for which, once, he was almost grateful.

"Send your boy down to the house for some money—ye needn't mind the bill; but I'll give you fifty florins. There's a trifle on account. Put them ten Naps. to my credit; that will wipe off some of our scores; it's good for forty crowns." Such were the brief sentences that he addressed to the amazed shopkeepers as he passed along; for Peter, like Louis Philippe, couldn't bear the sight of an account, and always paid something in liquidation. It was with great reluctance that he abstained from inviting each of them to dinner; nothing but his fear of displeasing Nelly could have restrained him. He would have asked the whole village if he dared, ay, and made them drunk, too, if they'd have let him. "She's so high in her notions," he kept muttering to himself: "that confounded pride about family, and the like! Well, thank God! I never had that failing. If I knew we were better than other people, it never made me unneighbourly; I was always free and affable; my worst enemy couldn't say other of me. I'd like to have these poor devils to dinner, and give them a skinful for once in their lives, just to drink Kate's health, and Frank's; they'd think of the Daltons for many a long year to come—the good old Dalton blood, that never mixed with the puddle! What a heavenly day it is! and an elegant fine market. There's a bit of roasting beef would feed a dozen; and maybe that isn't a fine trout! Well, well, but them's cauliflowers! Chickens and ducks—chickens and ducks—a whole street of them! And there's a wild turkey—mighty good eating, too! and venison!—ah! but it hasn't the flavour, nor the fat! Faix! and not bad either, a neck of mutton with onions, if one had a tumbler of whisky-punch afterwards."

Thus communing with himself, he passed along, totally inattentive to the solicitations of those who usually supplied the humble wants of his household, and who now sought to tempt him by morsels whose merits lay rather in frugality than good cheer.

As Dalton drew near his own door he heard the sounds of a stranger's voice from within. Many a time a similar warning had apprised him that some troublesome dun had gained admittance, and was torturing poor Nelly with his importunities; and on these occasions Peter was wont, with more cunning than kindness, to steal noiselessly downstairs again, and wait till the enemy had evacuated the fortress. Now, however, a change had come over his fortunes, and with his hat set jauntily on one side, and his hands stuck carelessly in his pockets, he kicked open the door with his foot, and entered.

Nelly was seated near the stove, in conversation with a man, who, in evident respect, had taken his place near the door, and from which he rose to salute Dalton as he came in. The traveller—for such his "blouse" or travelling-frock showed him to be, as well as the knapsack and stick at his feet—was a hale, fresh-looking man of about thirty; his appearance denoting an humble walk in life, but with nothing that bordered on poverty.

"Herr Brawer, papa,—Adolf Brawer," said Nelly, whispering the last words, to remind him more quickly of the name.

"Servant, sir," said Dalton, condescendingly; for the profound deference of the stranger's manner at once suggested to him their relative conditions.

"I kiss your hand," said Adolf, with the respectful salutation of a thorough Austrian, while he bowed again with even deeper humility.

"The worthy man who was so kind to Frank, papa," said Nelly, in deep confusion, as she saw the scrutinizing and almost depreciating look with which Dalton regarded him.

"Oh, the pedlar!" said Dalton, at last, as the remembrance flashed on him. "This is the pedlar, then?"

"Yes, papa. He came out of his way, from Durlach, just to tell us about Frank; to say how tall he had grown—taller than himself, he says—and so good-looking, too. It was so kind in him."

"Oh, very kind, no doubt of it—very kind indeed!" said Dalton, with a laugh of most dubious expression. "Did he say nothing of Frank's debt to him? Hasn't that I O U you were talking to me about anything to say to this visit?"

"He never spoke of it—never alluded to it," cried she, eagerly.

"Maybe he won't be so delicate with *me*," said Dalton. "Sit down, Mr. Brawer; make no ceremony here. We're stopping in this little place till our house is got ready for us. So you saw Frank, and he's looking well?"

"The finest youth in the regiment. They know him through all Vienna as the 'Handsome Cadet.'"

"And so gentle-mannered and unaffected," cried Nelly.

"Kind and civil to his inferiors?" said Dalton; "I hope he's that?"

"He condescended to know *me*," said Brawer, "and call me his friend."

"Well, and maybe ye were," said Peter, with a majestic wave of the hand. "A real born gentleman, as Frank is, may take a beggar off the streets and be intimate with him. Them's my sentiments. Mark what I say, Mr. Brawer, and you'll find, as you go through life, if it isn't true; good blood may mix with the puddle every day of the year, and not be the worse of it!"

"Frank is so grateful to you," broke in Nelly, eagerly; "and we are so grateful for all your kindness to him!"

"What an honour to *me!* that he should so speak of me!" said the pedlar, feelingly—"I, who had no claim upon his memory!"

"There was a trifle of money between you, I think," said Dalton, ostentatiously; "have you any notion of what it is?"

"I came not here to collect a debt, Herr von Dalton," said Adolf, rising, and assuming a look of almost fierceness in his pride.

"Very well—very well; just as you please," said Dalton, carelessly; "it will come with his other accounts in the half-year; for, no matter how liberal a man is to his boys, he'll be pestered with bills after all! There's blaguards will be lending them money, and teachin' them extravagance, just out of devilment, I believe. I know well how it used to be with myself when I was in old 'Trinity,' long ago. There was a little chap of the name of Foley, and, by the same token, a pedlar, too——"

"Oh, papa, he's going away, and you haven't thanked him yet!" cried Nelly, feelingly.

"What a hurry he's in!" said Dalton, as he watched the eager haste with which the pedlar was now arranging the straps of his knapsack.

"Would you not ask him to stay—to dine with us?" faltered Nelly, in a low, faint whisper.

"The pedlar—to dine?" asked Dalton, with a look of astonishment.

"Frank's only friend!" sighed she, mournfully.

"By my conscience, sometimes I don't know if I'm standing on my head or my heels," cried Dalton, as he wiped his brows, with a look of utter bewilderment. "A pedlar to dinner! There now—that's it—more haste worse speed: he's broke that strap in his hurry!"

"Shall I sew it for you?" said Nelly, stooping down and taking out her needle as she spoke.

"Oh, fräulein, how good of you!" cried Adolf; and his whole face beamed with an expression of delight. "How dearly shall I value this old pack hereafter!"

These last words, scarcely muttered above his breath, were overheard by Nelly, and a deep blush covered her cheeks as she bent over the work.

"Where's your own maid? Couldn't one of the women do it as well?" cried Dalton, impatiently. "Ye'd not believe, Mr. Brawer, that we have the house full of servants this minute; a set of devils feasting and fattening at one's expense."

"Thanks, fräulein," said the pedlar, as she finished; "you little know how I shall treasure this hereafter."

"Ask him to stay, papa," whispered Nelly once more.

"Sure he's a pedlar!" muttered Dalton, indignantly.

"At least thank him. Tell him you are grateful to him."

"He'd rather I'd buy ten yards of damaged calico—that's the flattery *he*'d understand best," said Dalton, with a grin.

"Farewell, Herr von Dalton. Farewell, fräulein!" said Adolf. And with a bow of deep respect he slowly retired from the room, while Nelly turned to the window to conceal her shame and sorrow together.

"It was this very morning," muttered Dalton, angrily, "when I spoke of giving a little dinner party, you did nothing but turn up your nose at this, that, and t'other. There was nobody good enough, forsooth! There was Monsieur Ratteau, the 'croupier' of the tables there, a very nice man, with elegant manners and the finest shirt-studs ever I seen, and you wouldn't hear of him."

Nelly heard little of this reproachful speech, for, sunk in the recess of the window, she was following with her eyes the retiring figure of Adolf Brawer. He had just crossed the "Platz," and ere he turned into a side street he stopped, wheeled round, and made a gesture of farewell towards the spot where, unseen by him, Nelly was still standing.

"He is gone!" muttered she, half aloud.

"Well, God speed him!" rejoined Dalton, testily. "I never could abide a pedlar."

* * *

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DE HEIDENDORF.

KATE DALTON'S was a heavy heart as, seated beside her new friend, she whirled along the road to Vienna. The scenery possessed every attraction of historic interest and beauty. The season was the glorious one of an Italian spring. There were ancient cities, whose very names were like spells to memory. There were the spots of earth that Genius has consecrated to immortality. There were the scenes where Poetry caught its inspiration, and around which, even yet, the mind-created images of fancy seem to linger, all to interest, charm, and amuse her, and yet she passed them without pleasure, almost without notice.

The splendid equipage in which she travelled—the hundred appliances of ease and luxury around her—the obsequious, almost servile devotion of her attendants, recalled but one stern fact—that she had sold herself for all these things; that for them she had bartered her warm affections—her love of father, and sister, and brother—the ties of home and of kindred—even to the Faith at whose altar she had bent her knees in infancy. She had given all for greatness!

In all her castle-buildings of a future, her own family had formed figures in the picture. To render her poor father happy—to surround his old age with the comforts he pined after—to open to dear Nelly sources of enjoyment in the pursuit she loved—to afford Frank the means of associating with his comrades of rank—to mix in that society for which he longed—these were her objects, and for them she was willing to pay dearly. But now she was not to witness the happiness of those she loved! Already the hard conditions of her contract were to be imposed. Banishment first, then Isolation; who could say what after!

Her travelling companion was scarcely well calculated to smoothe down the difficulties of this conflict in her mind. Madame de Heidendorf was the very reverse of Lady Hester. Without the slightest pretension to good looks herself, she assumed to despise everything like beauty in others, constantly associating its possession with the vanity of weak intellects; she threw a kind of ridicule over these "poor, pretty things," as she loved to call them, which actually seemed to make beauty and folly convertible terms. Political intrigue, or, to speak more fairly, mischief-making in state affairs, was her great and only passion. By dint of time, patience, considerable cunning, and a very keen insight into character, she had succeeded in obtaining the intimacy of many of the first statesmen of Europe. Many had trusted her with the conduct of little matters which the dignity of diplomacy could not stoop to. She had negotiated several little transactions, opened the way to reconciliations, smoothed the road to briberies, and allayed the petty qualms of struggling morality, where any other than a feminine influence would have been coarse and indelicate.

As a good monarchist, she was always well received at the Austrian Court, and in St. Petersburg was accustomed to be treated with peculiar honour.

By what amount of compensation, or in what shape administered, Midchekoff had secured her present services, this true history is unable to record; but that Kate was eminently fortunate, drawing such a prize in the lottery of life, as to enter the world under *her* auspices, were facts that she dwelt upon without ceasing.

Frankness and candour are very charming things; they are the very soul of true friendship, and the spirit of all affectionate interest; but they can be made very disagreeable elements of mere acquaintanceship. Such was Madame de Heidendorf's. She freely told Kate, that of all the great Midchekoff's unaccountable freaks, his intended marriage with herself was the very strangest; and that, to unite his vast fortune and high position with mere beauty was something almost incredible. There was a landgravine of Hohenhöckingen — an archduchess — a "*main gauche*" of the Austrian house itself—there was a granddaughter of the Empress Catherine—with any of whom she could easily have opened negotiations for him—all of them alliances rich in political influences. Indeed, there was another party—she was not at liberty to mention the name—and though, to be sure, she was "blind and almost idiotic," a union with her would eventually have made him a "Serene Highness." "So you see, my dear," said she, in winding up, "what you have cost him! Not," added she, after a few seconds' pause—"not but I have known such marriages turn out remarkably well. There was that Prince Adalbert of Bohemia, who married the singing woman—what's her name?—that young creature that made such a sensation at the 'Scala'—'La Biondina' they called her. Well, it is true, he only lived with her during the Carnival, but there she is now, with her handsome house in the Bastey, and the prettiest equipage in the Prater. I know several similar cases. The Archduke Max and Prince Ravitzkay—though, perhaps, not him, for I believe he sent that poor thing away to the mines."

"His wife—to the mines!" gasped Kate, in terror.

"Don't be frightened, my dear child," said madame, smiling; "be a good girl, and you shall have everything you like. Meanwhile, try and unlearn all those *gaucheries* you picked up with that strange Lady Hester. It was a shocking school of manners—all those eccentric, out-of-the-way people, who lounged in and lounged out, talking of nothing but each other, utterly ignorant of the great interests that are at stake in Europe at this moment. Try, therefore, and forget that silly coterie altogether. When we arrive at Vienna, you will be presented to the Archduchess Louisa."

"And I shall see dear—dear Frank!" burst out Kate, with an irrepressible delight.

"And who is Frank, madame?" said the other, proudly drawing herself up.

"My brother—my only brother—who is in the Austrian service."

"Is he on the Emperor's staff?"

"I know nothing of his position, only that he is a cadet."

"A cadet, child! Why, do you know that that means a common soldier—a creature that mounts with a musket, or carries a bread-bag over its shoulder through the streets in a fatigue-jacket?"

"I care nothing for all that. He may be all you say, and twice as humble, but he is my brother Frank still—the playfellow with whom I passed the day when—when I was happy—as I shall never be again!—the fond, kind brother, whom we were all so proud of."

An expression of scornful compassion on Madame de Heidendorf's features at once stopped Kate, and she covered her face with her hands to hide her shame.

"Madame la Princesse," began the countess—for whenever she peculiarly desired to impress Kate with her duties, she always prefaced the lesson by her new title—"the past must be forgotten, or you will find yourself totally unable to compete with the difficulties of your station. There is but one way to make the prince's *mésalliance* pardonable, which is by as seldom as possible parading its details. If, then, you insist upon seeing your brother during our stay at Vienna, it must be in secret. You said something, I think, of an old field-marshal—a connection?"

"My father's uncle, madame."

"Very true. Well, your brother can come with some letter or message from him; or if Nina, your maid, has no objection, he might pass for a lover of hers."

"Madame!" cried Kate, indignantly.

"I said, if Nina made no objection," said Madame de Heidendorf, as though answering the indignant exclamation. "But these are matters of *my* consideration, madame—at least, if I understand the spirit of the prince's instructions."

Some such scene as this, usually closing with a similar peroration, formed the conversation of the road; and hour by hour Kate's courage fell lower, as she contemplated all that her elevation had cost her. And what a mockery was it after all! It was true that she journeyed in a carriage with all the emblazonry of royalty; that a group of uncovered lacqueys attended her as she descended; that she was ever addressed by a proud title; a respectful, submissive devotion surrounding her at every instant. But, amid all this, there was not one look, one word of kindness; nothing of interest or sympathy with her solitary grandeur. It mattered little that the bars of her cell were of gold; it was a prison still.

With what eagerness did she turn from the present, with all its splendour, to think of her former life, when, wandering among the hills of Baden she had listened to little Hans, or watched dear Nelly, as the first gleams of her intentions began to manifest themselves on a sculptured group. With that rapture had she heard passages that seemed akin to something she had felt but could not express! How had she loved the changeful effects of light and shade on a landscape where every tree, or rock, or cliff was familiar to her! Oh! if she could but be back again, hopeful, ardent, and trusting, as she once was! Oh! if the brief past could be but a dream, and she were once more beside her father and Nelly, knowing nothing of that world which, in so short a space, had revealed so much before her! Even to those who so lately had supplied the place of family to her, all were gone, and she was utterly alone!

She did not dare to think of George Onslow. It seemed to her like a treason to recall his memory; and if his image did rise at times before her fancy, a burning blush would cover her cheek, and a sense of shame would send a throb like agony through her heart. The plans and projects for her future life she heard of without interest; a vague and confused impression of a long journey—halting here and there, to be presented to certain great and distinguished persons—and finally of her arrival at St. Petersburg, were all that she knew. That the prince was to join her there, and then, with the Emperor's permission, return with her to the south of Europe—such were the outlines of a career over which a sinking heart threw a gloomy shadow.

Madame de Heidendorf was too occupied with her own thoughts to notice this despondency; besides that, she was incessantly teaching Kate some one requisite or other of that rigid etiquette which prevailed in the society she was about to enter; the precise titles by which she was to address this or that personage; how many curtseys to give here, how many reverences there—little educational exercises that were always accompanied by some warning admonition of their importance to one who like herself had never seen anything like good society, and whose breaches of good breeding would be certain of being severely commented on.

"Think of the prince, madame," she would say; "think of what he will suffer when they repeat any of your transgressions. I am afraid there are many humiliations in store for him! And what a step to take at such a moment, with these horrible Socialist doctrines abroad—these levelling theories of equality, and so forth. I hope his Majesty the Emperor will pardon him—I hope he will forgive you."

This was a favourite speech of hers, and so often repeated, that Kate at last began to look on herself as a great criminal, and even speculated on what destiny should befall her if the Emperor proved unmerciful.

These were sorry resources to shorten the weariness on a journey, and Kate felt a throb of pleasure—the first she had experienced—when the towers of St. Stephen in the far distance announced the approach to Vienna.

CHAPTER VII.

AT VIENNA.

The gossiping world of Vienna had a new subject for speculation and interest, as a guard of honour was seen standing at a large palace near the "Hoff," and the only information to explain the mystery was, that some great diplomatist had arrived the evening before, and Heaven knew what wonderful events were in his charge and keeping. A gigantic "Chasseur," in green and gold, who lounged about the portal, followed by a great dog—a "fang-hund," whose silver collar was embossed with many a quartering—had engaged the attention of a very considerable crowd, which opened from time to time to permit the passage of some royal or princely equipage. As they thus fell back, a chance look would be directed upwards to the windows of the first floor, and there, passingly, they caught glimpses of one whose beauty soon formed the theme of every tongue. This was Kate Dalton, who, now rested from the fatigue of her journey and dressed in the most becoming fashion, walked up and down a splendid saloon, watching to catch every sound, or gazing earnestly from the window to catch any sight that might betoken her brother's coming. At Madame de Heidendorf's suggestion she had written a few lines that morning early to the Field-Marshal von Dalton, entreating, as a great favour, that he would procure leave for Frank to come to her, and pass as much of his time as possible with her during her stay in Vienna. The note, brief as it was, cost her some trouble; she felt that much explanation might be necessary to state her present position—even who she was—and yet this was a subject she had no heart to enter into. Some expressions of affectionate interest towards himself would also have been fitting, but she could not find time for them. Frank, and Frank alone, was in her thoughts, and she left everything to the old general's ingenuity, as she concluded her note by subscribing herself, "Your affectionate niece, Kate Dalton, Affianced Princesse de Midchekoff."

It was the first time that she had written the words—the first time that she had ever impressed that massive seal of many quarterings, so royal-looking as it seemed It was, also, the first time she had ever given an order to one of her servants; and the obsequious bows of the groom of the chamber, as he withdrew, were all separate and distinct sensations—low, but clear knockings of vanity at her heart, to which every object around contributed its aid. The apartment was splendid: not in that gorgeous taste of modern decoration of which she had seen so much already, but in a more stately fashion, recalling the grandeur of a past age, and exhibiting traces of a long line of princely occupants. The very portraits along the walls had a proud and haughty bearing, and the massive chairs glittered in all the blaze of heraldry. If she looked out, it was the towers of the "Hoff Bourg"—the Home of the Hapsburgs—met her eye. If she listened, it was the clank of a soldier's salute broke the stillness; while the dull roll of wheels beneath the arched gateway told of the tide of visitors who came to pay their homage.

If Kate's heart had been less bound up with anxiety to see her brother, the scene beneath her window would have afforded her some interest, as equipage after equipage succeeded—now the quiet splendour of a court chariot, now the more glaring magnificence of a cardinal's carriage. Here came the lumbering old vehicle of an archbishop, the reverential salute of the crowd indicating the rank of its occupant. Then the quick "present arms" of the sentry told of some general officer; while, at intervals, the "turn out" of the whole guard denoted the arrival of a royal prince. Ambassadors and ministers, chamberlains and chancellors, the dignitaries of the realm, the "Hautes Charges" of the Court—all came in crowds to present their respects to the Gräfin, for by this brief designation was she known from one end of Europe to the other. Madame de Heidendorf held a levée, and none would absent themselves from so interesting an occasion."

It was the eve of a wonderful moment in Europe—it was the little lull that preceded the most terrific storm that ever overturned thrones and scattered dynasties—as these illustrious personages were met together to interchange compliments, to lisp soft phrases of flattery, and discuss the high claims of some aspirant for a ribbon or a cross, a "Red Eagle" or a "Black" one. A few, more far-sighted than the rest, saw the cloud not bigger than a man's hand in the distance—a few could hear the low rumblings that denoted the brooding hurricane; but even they thought "the thing would last their time," and thus, with many a pleasant jest, they chatted over the events of the hour, praised the wisdom of kings, and laughed to scorn those vulgar teachers whose democratic theories were just beginning to be whispered about. Some were young, buoyant, and hopeful, ready to shed the last drop for the principles they professed; others were old grey-headed men, tried servants of Monarchy for half a century. But all were like-minded, and self-gratulation and compliment was the order of the day. Leaving them thus to such pleasant converse, where the clank of jewelled swords, or the tap of a diamond snuff-box, formed the meet accompaniments of the themes, we turn once more to her in whose fate we are more deeply interested.

Twice had she rung the bell to ask if the messenger had not returned. At last he came; but there was "no answer to her note!" Her impatience became extreme. She ordered the servant who carried the note to appear before her; questioned him closely as to whether he had taken it, and the reply he had received. A soldier had said, "Gut!" and shut the door. Poor Kate! It was her first lesson in "soldier laconics," and to say truly, she did not take it well. The "Princesse de Midchekoff" might have been treated with more deference. She was passing a mirror as the thought struck her, and her mien and air gave support to the belief; nor could she restrain the sense of admiration, half tinged with shame, her own beauty evoked.

"There is a soldier here, madame," said a servant, "who has a letter he will not deliver except into your own hands."

"Admit him—at once," said she impatiently; and as she spoke the soldier stepped forward, and drawing himself up, carried his hand to the salute, while, presenting a letter he, said, "From the Field-Marshal von Auersberg."

Kate scarcely looked at the bearer, but hastily tore open the square-shaped epistle.

"You need not wait," said she to the servant; and then turning to the letter, read,—

"'MADAME LA PRINCESSE AND BELOVED NIECE,—It was with—to me of late years—a rare satisfaction that I read the not the less affectionate that they were polite lines you vouchsafed to inscribe to me, an old and useless but not forgotten servant of an Imperial master. Immediately on perusing the aforesaid so-called note, I despatched my adjutant to the head-quarters of the Franz Carl, to obtain—no service rules to the contrary forbidding, nor any defaults punition in any wise preventing—a day's furlough for the Cadet von Dalton——"

"What regiment is yours?" said Kate, hastily, to the soldier.

"Franz Carl Infanterie, highness," said the youth, respectfully, using the title he had heard assumed by the servant.

"Do you know many of your comrades—among the cadets, I mean?"

"There are but seven in the battalion, highness, and I know them all."

"Is Von Dalton an acquaintance of yours?"

"I am Von Dalton, highness," said the youth, while a flush of surprise and pleasure lighted up his handsome features.

"Frank! Frank!" cried she, springing towards him with open arms; and ere he could recognize her, clasping him round the neck.

"Is this real? Is this a dream? Are you my own sister Kate?" cried the boy, almost choked with emotion. "And how are you here? and how thus?" and he touched the robe of costly velvet as he spoke.

"You shall know all, dear, dear Frank: you shall hear everything when the joy of this meeting will let me speak."

"They call you highness: and how handsome you've grown."

"Have I, Frank?" said she, pressing him down to a seat beside her, while, with hands interclasped, they sat gazing on each other.

"I am only beginning to remember you," said he, slowly. "You never used to wear your hair in long ringlets thus. Even your figure is changed; you are taller, Kate."

"It is the mere difference of dress, Frank," said she, blushing with conscious pride.

"No, no: you are quite changed. Even as I sit here beside you, I feel I know not what of shame at my daring to be so near——"

"So great a lady, you would say, dear Frank," said she laughing. "Poor boy, if you knew——" She stopped and then, throwing her arms around his neck, went on rapidly: "But, my own dear brother, tell me of yourself: are you happy—do you like the service—are they kind to you—is Uncle Stephen as we hoped he should be?"

"My story is soon told, Kate," said he; "I am where I was the day I entered the army. I should have been made a corporal——"

"A corporal!" cried Kate, laughing.

"A good thing it is, too," said the youth. "No guards to mount; no fatigue duty; neither night patrol, nor watch, and four kreutzers extra pay."

"Poor dear boy!" cried she, kissing his forehead, while she gazed on him with a compassionate affection that spoke a whole world of emotion.

"But tell me of yourself, Kate. Why do they call you the princess?"

"Because I am married, Frank—that is, I am betrothed, and will soon be married."

"And when did this occur? Tell me everything," cried he, impatiently.

"You shall know all, dearest Frank. You have heard how Lady Hester Onslow carried me away with her to Italy. Nelly has told you how we were living in Florence—in what splendour and festivity. Our palace frequented by all the great and distinguished of every country—French and German, and Spanish and Russian."

"I hate the Russians; but go on," said the boy, hastily.

"But why hate the Russians, Frank?" asked she, reddening, as she spoke.

"They are false-hearted and treacherous. See how they have driven the Circassians into a war, to massacre them; look how they are goading on the Poles to insurrection. Ay, they say that they have emissaries at this moment in Hungary on the same errand. I detest them."

"This may be their state policy, Frank, but individually——"

"They are no better; Walstein knows them well."

"And who is Walstein, Frank?"

"The finest fellow in the service; the one I would have wished you married to, Kate, above all the world. Think of a colonel of Hussars at eight-and-twenty, so handsome, so brave, and such a rider. You shall see him, Kate!"

"But it's too late, Frank," said she, laughing; "you forget it's too late!"

"Ah! so it is," sighed the boy, seriously. "I often feared this," muttered he, after a pause. "Nelly's letters told me as much, and I said to myself, 'It will be too late.'"

"Then Nelly has told you all, perhaps?" said she.

"Not everything, nor, indeed, anything at all very distinctly. I could only make out what seemed to be her own impressions, for they appeared mere surmises."

"And of what sort were they?" asked Kate, curiously.

"Just what you would suspect from her. Everlasting fears about temptations, and trials, and so forth, continually praying that your heart might resist all the flatteries about you. The old story about humility. I thought to myself, 'If the lesson be not more needful to Kate than to *me*, she runs no great risk after all!' for I was also warned about the seductions of the world! a poor cadet, with a few kreutzers a day, told not to be a Sybarite! Returning wet through from a five hours' patrol, to burnish accoutrements in a cold, damp barrack, and then exhorted against the contamination of low society, when all around me were cursing the hardships they lived in, and execrating the slavery of the service!"

"Our dearest Nelly knows so little of the world," said Kate, as she threw a passing glance at herself in the mirror, and arranged the fall of a deep fringe of gold lace which was fastened in her hair.

"She knows nothing of it," said the boy, adjusting his sword-knot. "She thought our Hussars wore white dolmans, and carried straight swords like the Cuirassiers."

"And the dear, simple creature asked me, in one of her letters, if I ever wore wild flowers in my hair now, as I used to do, long ago," said Kate, stealing another glance at the glass. "Flowers are pretty things in the head when rubies make the pinks, and the dewdrops are all diamonds."

Frank looked at her as she said this, and for the first time saw the proud elation her features assumed when excited by a theme of vanity.

"You are greatly changed, dearest Kate," said he, thoughtfully.

"Is it for the worse, Frank?" said she, half coquettishly.

"Oh! as to beauty, you are a thousand times handsomer," cried the boy, with enthusiasm. "I know not how, but every expression seems heightened, every feature more elevated; your air and gesture, your very voice, that once I thought was music itself, is far sweeter and softer."

"What a flatterer!" said she, patting his cheek.

"But then, Kate," said he, more gravely, "have these fascinations cost nothing? Is your heart as simple? Are your affections as pure? Ah! you sigh—and what a heavy sigh, too. Poor, poor Kate!"

And she laid her head upon his shoulder, while the heaving swell of her bosom told what sorrow the moment was costing her.

"Nelly, then, told you of my betrothal?" whispered she, in a weak, faint voice.

"No; I knew nothing of that. She told me all about the life you were leading; the great people with whom you were intimate; and bit by bit, a hint, some little allusion, would creep out as to the state of your heart. Perhaps she never meant it, or did not know it, but I remarked, in reading her letters over and over—they were the solace of many a weary hour—that one name recurred so often in connection with yours, you must have frequently referred to him yourself, for in each extract from your letters I saw the name."

"This was strange. It must have been through inadvertence," said she, musingly. "I thought I had scarcely spoken of him."

"See how your hand told truth, even against your consciousness," said he, smiling.

Kate made no reply, but sat deep in thought.

"And is he here? When shall I see him?" asked Frank, impatiently.

"No, Frank. He is in Italy; he was detained there by business of importance. Besides, it is not etiquette that we should travel together. When the Emperor's permission has been obtained——"

"What Emperor?" asked Frank, in astonishment.

"Our Emperor—the Czar."

"What have you, an English girl born, to do with the Czar?"

"The prince, my future husband, is his subject."

"Why, there is no end to this mystification," cried the boy, impatiently. "How can an English soldier be a Russian prince?"

"I don't understand you, Frank. Prince Midchekoff is a Russian by birth."

"So that you are married to a Russian," said he, in a voice of deep emotion, "and all this time I have been fancying my brother-in-law an Englishman. I thought it was this same George—George Onslow."

A heavy, dull sound startled him as he said this. It was Kate, who had fallen back fainting, on the sofa. It was long before, with all Frank's efforts at restoration, she came to herself; and, even when consciousness returned, tears flowed from her eyes and coursed down her cheeks copiously, as she lay speechless and motionless.

"My own poor Kate, my poor, dear sister!" were all that Frank could say, as he held her cold, clammy hand within his own; and, with an almost breaking heart, gazed on her pale features. It was so like death! "And might not death be better?" thought he, as he travelled over in his mind the story, of whose secret he was now possessed. How differently did he judge all Nelly's counsels *now!* In what a changed spirit did he think of that wisdom which, but a few minutes back, he had sneered at! "And so it is," muttered he. "If we, who are born to humble fortunes, would cherish ambition, we must pay for it with our hearts' blood. Nelly was right; she often said so. Over and over again did she tell me, 'goodness is the only safe road to greatness.' Oh, that one so beautiful as this should have missed the path!" And, sobbing violently, he kissed her hand, and watered it with his tears.

"Frank, you are with me—you'll not leave me," said she, faintly, as she opened her eyes and stared in bewilderment around her. "I remember everything now—everything," said she, with an emphasis on the last word. "This is Vienna: I recollect all. Ring that bell, Frank: let Nina come to me, but don't go away; be sure not to go."

Nina soon made her appearance, and, with a look of half surprise, half admiration at the handsome soldier, assisted Kate to arise.

"I'll be back presently, Frank," said she, with a faint smile, and left the room. And the youth, overcome by emotion, sat down and buried his face in his hands.

* * *

CHAPTER VIII.

PRIESTLY COUNSELS.

FRANK was so full of his own reflections, that he almost forgot his sister's absence; nor did he notice how the time went over, when he heard the sound of voices and the noise of a door closing: and, on looking up, perceived a handsome man, something short of middle-aged, who, dressed in the deep black of a priest, wore a species of blue silk collar, the mark of a religious order. His features were perfectly regular, and their expression the most bland and courteous it was possible to imagine. There was a serene dignity, too, in his gait, as he came forward, that showed how thoroughly at home he felt on the soft carpet, and in the perfumed atmosphere of a drawing-room.

Bowing twice to Frank, he saluted him with a smile, so gentle and so winning, that the boy almost felt as if they had been already acquainted.

"I have come," said the priest, "to pay my respects to the Princesse de Midchekoff, and, if my eyesight is not playing me false, I have the honour to recognize her brother."

Frank blushed with pleasure as he bowed an assent.

"May I anticipate the kindness—which your sister would not refuse me," continued he, "and introduce myself. You may, perhaps, have heard of the Abbé D'Esmonde?"

"Repeatedly," cried Frank, taking the proffered hand in his own. "Nelly spoke of you in almost every letter. You were always so kind to Kate in Italy."

"How amply am I recompensed, were not the pleasure of knowing Miss Dalton a sufficient reward in itself. It is rare to find that combination of excellence which can command all the homage of fashion, and yet win the approbation of a poor priest."

There was a humility, deep enough to be almost painful, in the tone in which these words were uttered; but Frank had little time to dwell on them, for already the abbé had taken a seat on the sofa beside him, and was deep in the discussion of all Kate's attractions and merits.

There was a sincerity, an ardour of admiration, chastened only by the temper of his sacred character, that delighted the boy. If allusion were made to her beauty, it was only to heighten the praise he bestowed on her for other gifts, and display the regulated action of a mind proof against every access of vanity. Her correct judgment, her intuitive refinement, the extreme delicacy of her sensibilities—these were the themes he dwelt upon, and Frank felt that they must be rare gifts indeed, when the very description of them could be so pleasurable.

From what the abbé said, so far from her marriage with the great Russian being a piece of fortune, she had but to choose her position amid the first houses of Europe. "It was true," he added, "that the 'Midchekoff's' wealth was like royalty, and as he united to immense fortune great claims of personal merit, the alliance had everything to recommend it."

"And this is so?" cried Frank, eagerly. "The prince is a fine fellow?"

"Generous and munificent to an extent almost fabulous," said D'Esmonde, who seemed rather to resume his own train of thought than reply to Frank's question. "The splendour of his life has already canonized a proverb."

"But his temper—his manner—his disposition?"

"Like all his countrymen, he is reserved, almost cold to strangers; his intimates, however, talk of him as frankness and candour itself. Even on political themes, where Russians are usually most guarded, he gives his opinions freely and manfully, and, strange enough too, with a liberality which, though common enough in our country, must be very rare indeed in his."

"That is strange!" said Frank, thoughtfully.

"Yes," said D'Esmonde, dropping into the tone of one who insensibly poured out his inmost thoughts in soliloquizing—"yes, he feels, what we all do, that this state of things cannot last—disparity of condition may become too palpable and too striking. The contrast between affluence and misery may display itself too offensively! Men may one day or other refuse to sign a renewal of the bond of servitude, and then—and then——"

"A civil war, I suppose," cried Frank, quietly; "but the troops will always give them a lesson."

"Do you think so, my dear young friend?" said the abbé, affectionately; "do you not rather think that soldiers will begin to learn that they are citizens, and that, when forging fetters for others, the metal can be fashioned into chains for themselves?"

"But they have an oath," said the boy; "they've sworn to their allegiance."

"Very true, so they have; but what is the oath?—the one-half of the compact, which cannot be supposed binding when the other half be broken. Let the social policy of a government fail in its great object—the happiness of a people; let a whole nation gradually cease to enjoy the advantages for the sake of which they assumed the responsibilities and ties of family; let them day by day fall lower in the scale of civilization and comfort, and after surrendering this privilege to-day, and that to-morrow, at last take their stand on the very verge of the precipice, with nothing but abject slavery beneath—what would you say of the order to charge them with the bayonet, even though the formality of a recruiting oath should seem to warrant the obedience?"

"I'd do it, if I was ordered," said Frank, sternly.

"I don't think you would," said D'Esmonde, smiling. "I read your nature differently. I can trace, even in the flashing of your eye this instant, the ambition of a bold and energetic spirit, and that when the moment came you would embrace the losing cause, with all its perils, rather than stand by tyranny, in all its strength. Besides, remember, this is not the compact under which you entered the service, although it might, under certain peculiar circumstances, appeal to your sense of duty. An army is not—at least it ought not to be—a 'gendarmerie.' Go forth to battle against the enemies of your country—carry the flag of your Vaterland into the plains of France—plant the double eagle once more in the Place du Carrousel—even aggressive war has its glorious compensations in deeds of chivalry and heroism——But, here is the princesse," said the abbé, rising, and advancing courteously towards her.

"The Abbé D'Esmonde!" cried Kate, with an expression of delight, as she held out her hand, which the priest pressed to his lips with all the gallantry of a courtier. "How pleasant to see the face of a friend in this strange land!" said she. "Abbé, this is my brother Frank, of whom you have heard me talk so often."

"We are acquaintances already," said D'Esmonde, passing his arm within the soldier's; "and, albeit our coats are not of the same colour, I think many of our principles are."

A few moments saw him seated between the brother and sister on the sofa, recounting the circumstances of his journey, and detailing, for Kate's amusement, the latest news of Florence.

"Lady Hester is much better in health and spirits, too," said the abbé; "the disastrous circumstances of fortune would seem to have taken a better turn; at least, it is probable that Sir Stafford's losses will be comparatively slight. I believe her satisfaction on this head arises entirely from feeling that no imputation of altered position can now be alleged as the reason for her change of religion."

"And has she done this?" asked Kate, with a degree of anxiety; for she well knew on what feeble grounds Lady Hester's convictions were usually built.

"Not publicly; she waits for her arrival at Rome, to make her confession at the shrine of St. John of Lateran. Her doubts, however, have all been solved—her reconciliation is perfect."

"Is she happy? Has she found peace of mind at last?" asked Kate, timidly.

"On this point I can speak with confidence," said D'Esmonde, warmly; and at once entered into a description of the pleasurable impulse a new train of thoughts and impressions had given to the exhausted energies of a "fine lady's" life. It was so far true, indeed, that for some days back she had never known a moment of ennui. Surrounded by sacred emblems and a hundred devices of religious association, she appeared to herself as if acting a little poem of life, wherein a mass of amiable qualities, of which she knew nothing before, were all developing themselves before her. And what between meritorious charities, saintly intercessions, visits to shrines, and decorations of altars, she had not an instant unoccupied; it was one unceasing round of employment; and with prayers, bouquets, lamps, confessions, candles, and penances, the day was even too short for its duties.

The little villa of La Rocca was now a holy edifice. The drawing-room had become an oratory; a hollow-cheeked "Seminariste," from Como, had taken the place of the Maestro di Casa. The pages wore a robe like acolytes; and even Albert Jekyl began to fear that a costume was in preparation for himself, from certain measurements that he had observed taken with regard to his figure.

"My time is up," said Frank, hastily, as he arose to go away.

"You are not about to leave me, Frank?" said Kate.

"Yes, I must; my leave was only till four o'clock, as the field-marshal's note might have shown you; but I believe you threw it into the fire before you finished it."

"Did I, really? I remember nothing of that. But, stay, and I will write to him. I'll say that I have detained you."

"But the service, Kate dearest! My sergeant—my over-lieutenant—my captain—what will they say? I may hav to pass three days in irons for the disobedience."

"Modern chivalry has a dash of the treadmill through it," said D'Esmonde, sarcastically; and the boy's cheek flushed as he heard it. The priest, however, had already turned away, and, walking into the recess of a window, left the brother and sister free to talk unmolested.

"I scarcely like him, Kate," whispered Frank.

"You scarcely know him yet," she said, with a smile. "But when can you come again to me—to-morrow, early?"

"I fear not. We have a parade and a field-inspection, and then 'rapport' at noon."

"Leave it to me, then, dear Frank," said she, kissing him; "I must try if I cannot succeed with 'the Field' better than you have done."

"There's the recall-bugle," cried the boy, in terror; and, snatching up his cap, he bounded from the room at once.

"A severe service—at least one of rigid discipline," said D'Esmonde, with a compassionating expression of voice; "it is hard to say whether it works for good or evil, repressing the development of every generous impulse, as certainly as it restrains the impetuous passions of youth."

"True," said Kate, pointedly; "there would seem something of priestcraft in their régime. The individual is nothing, the service everything."

"Your simile lacks the great element—force of resemblance, madame," said D'Esmonde, with a half smile. "The soldier has not, like the priest, a grand sustaining hope—a glorious object before him. He knows little or nothing of the cause in which his sword is drawn—his sympathies may even be against his duty. The very boy who has just left us—noble-hearted fellow that he is—what strange wild notions of liberty has he imbibed! how opposite are all his speculations to the stern calls of the duty he has sworn to discharge!"

"And does he dare——"

"Nay, madame, there was no indiscretion on his part; my humble walk in life has taught me, that if I am excluded from all participation in the emotions which sway my fellow-men, I may at least study them as they arise, watch them in their infancy, and trace them to their fruit of good or evil. Do not fancy, dear lady, that it is behind the grating of the confessional only that we read men's secrets. As the physician gains his knowledge of anatomy from the lifeless body, so do we learn the complex structure of the human heart in the death-like stillness of the cell, with the penitent before us! But yet all the knowledge thus gained is but a step to something further. It is while reading the tangled story of the heart

—its struggles—its efforts—the striving after good, here—the inevitable fall back to evil, there—the poor, weak attempt at virtue—the vigorous energy of vice—it is hearing this sad tale from day to day—learning, in what are called the purest natures, how deep the well of corruption lies, and that not one generous thought, one noble aspiration, or one holy desire rises unalloyed by some base admixture of worldly motive. It is thus armed we go forth into the world, to fight against the wiles and seductions of life! How can *we* be deceived by the blandishments that seduce others? What avail to us those pretentious displays of self-devotion—those sacrifices of wealth—those proud acts of munificence which astonish the world, but of whose secret springs we are conversant? What wonder, then, if I have read the artless nature of a boy like that, or see in him the springs of an ambition he knows not of himself? Nay, it would be no rash boast to say that I have deciphered more complicated inscriptions than those upon his heart. I have traced some upon his sister's!" The last three words he uttered with a slow and deep enunciation, leaving a pause between each, and bending on her a look of intense meaning.

Kate's cheek became scarlet, then pale, and a second time she flushed, till neck and shoulders grew crimson together.

"You have no confidences to make me, my dear, dear child," said D'Esmonde, as, taking her hand, he pressed her down on a sofa beside him. "Your faltering lips have nothing to articulate—no self-repinings, no sorrows to utter; for I know them all!" He paused for a few seconds, and then resumed: "Nor have you to fear me as a stern or a merciless judge. Where there is a sacrifice, there is a blessing!"

Kate held down her head, but her bosom heaved, and her frame trembled with emotion.

"Your motives," resumed he, "would dignify even a rasher course. I know the price at which you have bartered happiness—not your own only, but another's with it!"

She sobbed violently, and pressed her hands over her face.

"Poor, poor fellow!" cried he, as if borne away by an impulse of candour that would brook no concealment, "how I grieved to see him, separated, as we were, by the wide and yawning gulf between us, giving himself up to the very recklessness of despair, now cursing the heartless dissipation in which his life was lost, now accusing himself of golden opportunities neglected, bright moments squandered, petty misunderstandings exaggerated into dislikes, the passing coldness of the moment exalted into a studied disdain! We were almost strangers to each other before—nay, I half fancied that he kept aloof from me. Probably"—here D'Esmonde smiled with a bland dignity—"probably he called me a 'Jesuit'—that name so full of terror to good Protestant ears; but, on his sick-bed, as he lay suffering and in solitude, his faculties threw off the deceptive influences of prejudice; he read me then more justly; he saw that I was his friend. Hours upon hours have we passed talking of you; the theme seemed to give a spring to an existence from which, till then, all zest of life had been withdrawn. I never before saw as much of passion, with a temper so just and so forgiving. He needed no aid of mine to read your motives truly. 'It is not for herself that she has done this,' were words that he never ceased to utter. He knew well the claims that family would make on you, the heartrending appeals from those you could not but listen to! 'Oh! if I could but think that she will not forget me; that some memory of me will still linger in her mind!' this was his burning prayer, syllabled by lips parched by the heat of fever; and when I told him to write to you —— "

"To write to me!" cried she, catching his arm, while her cheeks trembled with intense agony, "you did not give such counsel?"

"Not alone that," said D'Esmonde, calmly, "but promised that I would myself deliver the letter into your hands. Is martyrdom less glorious that a cry of agony escapes the victim, or that his limbs writhe as the flame wraps round them? Is self-sacrifice to be denied the sorrowful satisfaction to tell its woes? I bade him write, because it would be good for him and for you alike."

She stared eagerly, as if to ask his meaning.

"Good for both," repeated he, slowly. "Love will be, to him, a guide-star through life, leading him by paths of high and honourable ambition; to you, it will be the consolation of hours that even splendour will not enliven. Believe me"—here he raised his voice to a tone of command and authority—"believe me that negation is the lot of all. Happiest they who only suffer in their affections! And what is the purest of all love? Is it not that the devotee feels for his protecting saint—that sense of ever-present care—that consciousness of a watching, unceasing affection, that neither slumbers nor wearies, following us in our joy, beside us in our afflictions? Some humble effigy, some frail representation, is enough to embody this conception, but its essence lies in the heart of hearts! Such a love as this—pure, truthful, and enduring—may elevate the humblest life into heroism, and throw a sun-gleam over the dreariest path of destiny. The holy bond that unites the grovelling nature below with glory above, has its humble type on earth in those who, separated by fate, are together in affection! I bade him write to you a few lines; he was too weak for more; indeed, his emotion almost made the last impossible. I pressed him, however, to do it, and pledged myself to place them in your hands; my journey hither had no other object." As he spoke, he took forth a small sealed packet, and gave it to Kate, whose hands trembled as she took it.

"I shall spend some days in Vienna," said he, rising to take leave; "pray let me have a part of each of them with you. I have much to say to you, and of other matters than those we have now spoken." And kissing her hand with a respectful devotion, the abbé withdrew, without ever once raising his eyes towards her.

Sick with sorrow and humiliation—for such she acutely felt—Kate Dalton rose and retired to her room. "Tell Madame de Heidendorf, Nina," said she, "that I feel tired to-day, and beg she will excuse my not appearing at dinner."

Nina curtseyed her obedience, but it was easy to see that the explanation by no means satisfied her, and that she was determined to know something more of the origin of her young mistress's indisposition.

"Madame knows that the archduke is to dine here."

"I know it," said Kate, peevishly, and as if desirous of being left in quiet.

Nina again curtseyed, but in the brilliant flashing of her dark eyes it was plain to mark the consciousness that some secret was withheld from her. The *soubrette* class are instinctive readers of motives—"their only books are '*ladies*' ' looks "—but they con them to perfection. It was then with a studied pertinacity that Nina proceeded to arrange drawers and fold dresses, and fifty other similar duties, the discharge of which she saw was torturing her mistress.

"I should wish to be alone, Nina, and undisturbed," said Kate, at last, her patience being entirely exhausted.

Nina made her very deepest reverence, and withdrew.

Kate waited for a few seconds, till all sound of her retiring steps had died away, then arose, and locked the door.

She was alone; the packet which the abbé had delivered lay on the table before her; she bent down over it, and wept. The utter misery of sorrow is only felt where self-reproach mingles with our regrets. All the pangs of other misfortunes are light in comparison with this. The irrevocable past was her own work; she knew it, and cried, till her very heart seemed bursting.

CHAPTER IX.

SECRETS OF HEAD AND HEART.

I MUST ask of my reader to leave this chamber, where, overwhelmed by her sorrows, poor Kate poured out her grief in tears, and follow me to a small but brilliantly-lighted apartment, in which a little party of four persons was seated, discussing their wine, and enjoying the luxury of their cigars. Be not suprised when we say that one of the number was a lady. Madame de Heidendorf, however, puffed her weed with all the zest of a smoker; the others were the Archduke Ernest, a plain, easy-tempered looking man, in the grey undress of an Austrian general; the Foreign minister, Count Nörinberg; and our old acquaintance, the Abbé D'Esmonde.

The table, besides the usual ornaments of a handsome dessert, was covered with letters, journals, and pamphlets, with here and there a coloured print in caricature of some well-known political personage. Nothing could be more easy and unconstrained than the air and bearing of the guests. The archduke sat with his uniform coat unbuttoned, and resting one leg upon a chair before him; the minister tossed over the books, and brushed off the ashes of his cigar against the richly-damasked tablecloth; while even the abbé seemed to have relaxed the smooth urbanity of his face into a look of easy enjoyment. Up to this moment the conversation had been general, the principal topics being the incidents of the world of fashion, the flaws and frivolities, the mishaps and misadventures of those whose names were familiar to his imperial highness, and in whose vicissitudes he took the most lively interest. These, and a stray anecdote of the turf in England, were the only subjects he cared for, hating politics and state affairs with a most cordial detestation. His presence, however, was a compliment that the court always paid "the countess," and he submitted to his turn of duty manfully.

Deeply involved in the clouds of his cigar-smoke, and even more enveloped in the misty regions of his own reveries, he sipped his wine in silence, and heard nothing of the conversation about him. The minister was then perfectly free to discuss the themes most interesting to him, and learn whatever he could of the state of public opinion in Italy.

"You are quite right, abbé," said he, with a sage shake of the head. "Small concessions, petty glimpses of liberty, only give a zest for more enlarged privileges. There is nothing like a good flood of popular anarchy for creating a wholesome disgust to freedom. There must be excesses!"

"Precisely so, sir," said the abbé. "There can be no question of an antidote if there has been no poisoning."

"Ay; but may not this system be pushed too far? Is not his Holiness already doing so?"

"Some are disposed to think so, but I am not of the number," said D'Esmonde. "It is necessary that he should himself be convinced that the system is a bad one; and there is no mode of conviction so palpable as by a personal experience. Now, this he will soon have. As yet, he does not see that every step in political freedom is an advance towards the fatal heresy that never ceases its persecutions of the Church. Not that our Revolutionists care for Protestantism or the Bible either; but, by making common cause with those who do, see what a large party in England becomes interested for their success. The right of judgment conceded in religious matters, how can you withold it in political ones? The men who brave the Church will not tremble before a cabinet. Now the Pope sees nothing of this; he even mistakes the flatteries offered to himself for testimonies of attachment to the Faith, and all those kneeling hypocrites who implore his blessing he fancies are faithful children of Rome. He must be awakened from this delusion; but yet none save himself can dispel it. He is obstinate and honest."

"If the penalty were to be his own alone, it were not so much matter," said the minister; "but it will cost a revolution."

"Of course it will; but there is time enough to prepare for it."

"The state of the Milanais is far from satisfactory," said the minister, gravely.

"I know that; but a revolt of a prison always excuses double irons," said D'Esmonde, sarcastically.

"Tell him of Sardinia, abbé," said Madame de Heidendorf.

"Your real danger is from that quarter," said D'Esmode. "There is a growing spirit of independence there—a serious desire for free institutions, wide apart from the wild democracy of the rest of Italy. This is a spirit you cannot crush; but you can do better—you can corrupt it. Genoa is a hotbed of Socialist doctrine; the wildest fanaticism of the 'Reds' is there triumphant, and our priests are manfully aiding the spread of such opinions. They have received orders to further these notions; and it is thus, and by the excesses consequent on this, you will succeed in trampling down that moderated liberty which is the curse that England is destined to disseminate amongst us. It is easy enough to make an excited people commit an act of indiscretion, and then, with public opinion on your side——"

"How I detest that phrase!" said Madame de Heidendorf; "it is the lowest cant of the day."

"The thing it represents is not to be despised, madame," said the abbé.

"These are English notions," said she, sneeringly.

"They will be Russian ones yet, depend upon it, madame."

"I'd rather know what a few men of vast fortune, like Midchekoff, for instance, think, than have the suffrages of half the greasy mobs of Europe."

"By the way," said the minister, "what is he doing? Is it true that he is coquetting with Liberals and Fourierists, and all that?"

"For the moment he is," said Madame de Heidendorf; "and two or three of the popularity-seeking sovereigns have sent him their decorations, and if he does not behave better he will be ordered home."

"He is of great use in Italy," said the minister.

"True; but he must not abuse his position."

"He is just vain enough to lend himself to a movement," said D'Esmonde; "but he shall be watched."

These last words were very significantly uttered.

"You know the princess, abbé?" asked the minister, with a smile; and another smile, as full of meaning, replied to the question.

"She's pretty, ain't she?" asked the archduke.

"Beautiful is the word, sir; but if your imperial highness would like to pass judgment personally, I'll beg of her to come down to the drawing-room."

"Of all things, most kind of you to make the offer," said he, rising and arranging his coat and sword-knot into some semblance of propriety, while Madame de Heidendorf rang the bell, and despatched a messenger to Kate with the request.

Nina was overjoyed at the commission entrusted to her. Since Kate's peremptory order, she had not ventured to intrude herself upon her; but now, armed with a message, she never hesitated about invading the precincts of that silent chamber, at whose door she often stood in doubt and speculation.

She tapped gently at the door: there was no answer. A second summons was alike unreplied to, and Nina bent down her head to listen. There were long-drawn breathings, like sleep, but a heavy sigh told that the moments were those of waking sorrow. Cautiously turning the handle of the door, without noise, she opened it and passed in. The room was shrouded in a dim half-light, and it was not till after the lapse of some seconds that Nina could distinguish the form of her young mistress, as with her head buried in her hands she sat before a table on which lay an open letter.

So absorbed was Kate in grief that she heard nothing, and Nina approached her, slowly, till at last she stood directly behind her, fixedly regarding the heaving figure, the dishevelled hair, and the trembling hands, that seemed to clutch with eagerness some object within their grasp. Kate suddenly started, and pushing back her hair from her eyes, seemed as if trying to collect her wandering thoughts. Then, unclasping a case, she placed a miniature before her, and contemplated it attentively. Nina bent over her till she almost touched her in her eagerness. Had any one been there to have seen her features at the moment, they would have perceived the traits of intense and varied passion, surprise, rage, and jealousy, all struggling for the mastery. Her dark skin grew almost livid, and her black eyes glowed with anger, while with a force like convulsion, she pressed her hands to her heart, as if to calm its beatings. A sea of stormy passions was warring within her, and in her changeful expression might be seen the conflict of her resolves. At last, she appeared to have decided, for, with noiseless steps, she gradually retreated toward the door, her eyes all the while steadily fixed on her mistress.

It seemed to require no slight effort to repress the torrent of rage within her, for even at the door she stood irresolute for a moment, and then, softly opening it, withdrew. Once outside, her pent-up passions found vent, and she sobbed violently. Her mood was, however, more of anger than of sorrow, and there was an air of almost insolent pride in the way she now knocked, and then, without waiting for reply, entered the room.

"Madame de Heidendorf requests that the princess will appear in the drawing-room," said she, abruptly, and confronting Kate's look of confusion with a steadfast stare.

"Say that I am indisposed, Nina—that I feel tired and unwell," said Kate, timidly.

"There is an archduke, madame."

"What care I for an archduke, Nina?" said Kate, trying to smile away the awkwardness of her own disturbed manner.

"I have always believed that great folk liked each other," said Nina, sarcastically.

"Then I must lack one element of that condition, Nina," said Kate, good-humouredly; "but pray make my excuses—say anything you like, so that I may be left in quiet."

"How delightful madame's reveries must be, when she attaches such value to them!"

"Can you doubt it, Nina?" replied Kate, with a forced gaiety. "A betrothed bride ought to be happy; you are always telling me so. I hear of nothing from morn till night but of rich caskets of gems and jewels; you seem to think that diamonds would throw a lustre over any gloom."

"And would they not?" cried Nina, passionately. "Has not the brow nobler and higher thoughts when encircled by a coronet like this? Does not the heart beat with greater transport beneath gems like these?" And she opened case after case of sparkling jewels as she spoke, and spread them before Kate, on the table.

"And yet I have learned to look on them calmly," said Kate, with an expression of proud indifference.

"Does not that dazzle you?" said Nina, holding up a cross of rose diamonds.

"No!" said Kate, shaking her head.

"Nor that?" cried Nina, displaying a gorgeous necklace.

"Nor even that, Nina."

"Is madame's heart so steeled against womanly vanities," said Nina, quickly, while she threw masses of costly articles before her, "that not one throb, not one flush of pleasure, is called up at sight of these?"

"You see, Nina, that I can look on them calmly."

"Then this, perchance, may move you!" cried Nina; and with a bound she sprang to the table at which Kate was seated, and, dashing the handkerchief away, seized the miniature, and held it up.

Kate uttered a shrill cry and fell back fainting. Nina gazed at her for a second or so with a look of haughty disdain, and sprinkling the pale features with a few drops of water, she turned away. With calm composure she replaced each precious gem within its case, laid the miniature once more beneath the handkerchief, and then left the room.

"Your princess will not honour us, it seems, with her company," said the archduke, half in pique, as the messenger returned with Kate's excuses; "and yet I looked for her coming to get rid of all the farrago of politics that you wise folk will insist upon talking."

The countess and the minister exchanged most significant glances at this speech, while D'Esmonde politely assented to the remark, by adding something about the relaxation necessary to overwrought minds, and the need that princes should enjoy some repose as well as those of lower degree. "I can, however, assure your imperial highness," said he, "that this is no caprice of the young princess. She is really far from well, and was even unable to receive her own relative this afternoon, the Count von Dalton."

"What, is old Auersberg a relative of hers?"

"An uncle, or a grand-uncle—I forget which, sir."

"Then that wild youth in the Franz Carl must be a connection too?"

"The cadet is her brother, sir."

"Indeed! What an extravagant fellow it is! They say that, counting on being Auersberg's heir, he spends money in every possible fashion; and as the tradespeople take the succession on trust, his debts are already considerable. It was only yesterday his colonel spoke to me of sending him to the Banat, or some such place. His family must be rich, I suppose?"

"I believe quite the reverse, sir. Poor to indigence. Their entire hope is on the Count von Auersberg."

"He held a frontier command for many years, and must have saved money. But will he like to see it in hands like these?"

"I believe—at least so the story goes," said D'Esmonde, dropping his voice to a whisper, "that the boy's arguments have scarcely assisted his object in that respect. They say that he told the count that in times like these no man's fortune was worth a year's purchase; that when monarchs were tottering and thrones rocking it were better to spend one's means freely than to tempt pillage by hoarding it."

"Are these his notions?" cried the archduke, in amazement.

"Yes; the wildest doctrines of Socialism are his creed—opinions, I grieve to say, more widely spread than any one supposes."

"How is this, then? I see the private regimental reports of every corps, I read the conduct-rolls of almost every company, and yet no hint of this disaffection has reached me."

"A priest could reveal more than an adjutant, sir," said the abbé, smiling. "These youths who fancy themselves neglected—who think their claims disregarded—who, in a word, imagine that some small pretension, on the score of family, should be the spring of their promotion, are easily seduced into extravagant ideas about freedom and so forth."

"Austria is scarce the land for such fruit to ripen in," said the archduke, laughing. "Let him try France, or the United States."

"Very true, your highness," chimed in the abbé; "but such boys ought to be watched—their conduct inquired strictly into."

"Or better still, Monsieur l'abbé," said the archduke, sternly, "dismissed the service. I see no profit in retaining amongst us the seeds of this French malady."

"I believe your highness takes the true view of the difficulty," said D'Esmonde, as though reflecting over it. "And yet you will be asked to make an officer of him in a day or two."

"An officer of this boy, and why? or by whom?"

"The princess, his sister, will make the request; probably through Von Auersberg."

"But when I tell the 'Feld'——"

"Ah, your imperial highness could not betray a confidence!" said D'Esmonde. "I have ventured to disclose to you what has come to my knowledge by means only accessible to myself; I therefore rely on your highness not to divulge, however you may use it."

"He shall not continue to wear our cloth; that you may certainly rely on, Monsieur l'abbé," said the archduke, sternly.

"In any case, wait for his sister's departure, sir," said D'Esmonde, anxiously; "a few days or hours. As soon as this silly old lady has made up that budget of gossip and scandal she fancies to be political news, we'll see her leave this, and then he can be dealt with as you think proper."

The archduke made no reply—not seeming either to assent to or reject the counsel. "It would break the old Marshal's heart," said he, at last; "that gallant old soldier would never survive it."

"A treason might, indeed, kill him," said D'Esmonde. "But your highness will anticipate exposure by dismissal—dismissal, peremptory and unexplained."

Again the archduke was silent, but his lowering brow and dark expression told that the subject was giving him deep and serious thought. "I paid no attention to your conversation this evening, abbé," said he, at last; "but it struck me, from a chance word here and there, that you suspect these same 'Liberal' notions are gaining ground."

"Heresies against the Faith, sir, have begotten their natural offspring, heresies against the State; and Governments do not yet awaken to the fact that they who scorn the altar will not respect the throne. The whole force of what are called Liberal institutions has been to weaken the influence of the clergy; and yet it is precisely on that same influence you will have to fall back. It is beneath the solemn shadow of the Church you'll seek your refuge yet!"

"No, no, father," said the archduke, with a laugh; "we have another remedy."

"The mitre is stronger than the *mitraille*, after all," said D'Esmonde, boldly. "Believe me, sir, that the solemn knell that tolls an excommunication will strike more terror through Christendom than all your artillery."

Either the remark or the tone in which it was uttered was unpleasing to the prince; indeed, all the abbé's courtesy at times gave way to an almost impetuous boldness, which royalty never brooks, for he turned away haughtily, and joined the others at a distant part of the room.

There was something of scorn in the proud look which D'Esmonde gave after him, and then slipped from the chamber with noiseless step and disappeared. Inquiring the way to the princess's apartment, the abbé slowly ascended the stairs, pondering deeply as he went. Nina was passing the corridor at the moment, and, supposing hat he had mistaken the direction, politely asked if she could offer him any guidance? Scarcely noticing the questioner, he replied,—

"I was looking for the Princesse de Midchekoff's apartments."

"It is here, sir; but she is indisposed."

"If you would say that the Abbé D'Esmonde——"

He had got thus far when, lifting his eyes, his glance fell upon her features; and then, as if spell-bound, he stood silently gazing at her. Nina's cheek grew crimson under the stare; but her eyes met his with unshaken firmness.

"If I were to disbelieve all probabilities," said he, slowly, "I should say that I see an old friend before me. Are you not the daughter of Huertos, the Toridor of Seville?"

"Fra Eustace!" said Nina, stepping back and staring steadily at him.

"No longer so, Lola; I am the Abbè D'Esmonde now," said he, while a faint flush tinged his pale features.

"And I am Nina, the 'Cameriera,'" replied she, scornfully. "See how unequally fortune has dealt with us!"

D'Esmonde made a sign towards the door, which she at once understood and answered,—

"Yes, in the service of the princess."

"This is indeed a strange meeting, Lola."

"Call me Nina," said the girl, flushing, "or I shall remember old times, and my Spanish blood will little bear such memories."

"Where can we talk together Nina?"

"Come this way, holy father," said she, with a half-sneering smile. "I suppose a poor girl may receive her confessor in her chamber."

D'Esmonde walked after her without speaking. While crossing a gallery she unlocked a door, and admitted him into a small but neatly-furnished room.

"Dear Lola," said the priest, as, taking her hand, he looked affectionately at her—"I must needs call you by the old name—what turn of fortune has brought you here?"

"It is a question well becomes you," said the girl, releasing her hand from his grasp, and drawing herself proudly up. "You cut the bark adrift, and you wonder that it has become a wreck!"

"How this old warmth of temper recalls the past, and how I love you for it, as I grieve over it, Lola; but be calm, and tell me everything, just as you used to tell me years ago."

"Oh! if I had the same pure heart as then," cried the girl, passionately. "Oh! if I could but shed tears, as once I did, over each slight transgression, and not have my spirit seared and hardened, as the world has made it."

"We cannot carry the genial freshness of youth into the ripe years of judgment, Lola. Gifts decay, and others succeed them."

"No more of this casuistry. *You* are, I see, the same, whatever changes time may have made in *me;* but I have outlived these trickeries. Tell me, frankly, what do you want with me?"

"Must there needs be some motive of self-interest in renewing an old but interrupted friendship, Lola? You remember what we once were to each other?"

"Oh, that I could forget it!—oh, that I could wash out the thought, or even think it but a dream! But how can you recall these memories? If the sorrow be mine, is not the shame all yours?"

"The shame and the sorrow are alike mine," said D'Esmonde, in a voice of deep dejection. "*You* alone, of all the world, were ever able to shake within me the great resolves that in prayer and devotion I had formed. For *you*, Lola, I was, for a space, willing to resign the greatest cause that ever man engaged in. Ay, for love of *you*, I was ready to peril everything—even to my soul! Is not this enough for shame and sorrow too? Is not this humiliation for one who wears the robe that I do?"

"You were a student in those days," said Nina, with a sneering smile; "and I never heard you speak of all those dreadful sacrifices. You used to talk of leaving the college with a light heart. You spoke of the world as if you were impatient to mingle with it. You planned I know not how many roads to fortune and advancement. Among other careers, I remember"—and here she burst into a scornful laugh, that made the priest's cheek grow crimson with passion—"I remember how you hit upon one which speaks rather for your ardour than your prudence. Do you forget that you would be a Toridor—you whose cheek grew pale and whose heart sickened as my father's horse lay embowelled in the ring, and who fainted outright when the bull's horns were driven into the barricade near you. You a Toridor! A Toridor should have courage!" And, as she spoke, her eyes flashed with the fire of passion.

"Courage!" said the priest, in a voice almost guttural from emotion,—"and is there no other courage than the vulgar defiance of personal danger—the quality of the veriest savage and the merest brute in creation? Is there nothing more exalted in courage than to face bodily peril? Are all its instincts selfishness? What think you of the courage of him who, in all the conscious strength of intellect, with powers to win an upward way amongst the greatest and the highest, can stoop to a life of poverty and neglect—can give up all that men strive for—home, affection, family, citizenship—content to toil apart and alone—to watch, to fast, and pray, and think—ay, think till the very brain reels with labour—and all this for a cause in which he is but a unit! Courage! Tell me not of courage beside that of him who dares to shake the strongest thrones, and convulses empires with his word, whose counsels brave the might of armies, and dare even kings to controvert; and, greatest of all, the courage that for a cause can risk salvation! Yes, Lola, he who to save others hazards his own eternity! Have I not done it?" cried he, carried away by an impetuous rush of feeling. "Have I not overborne the truth and sustained the falsehood? Have I not warped the judgments, and clouded the faculties, and misdirected the aspirations of many who came to me for counsel, knowing that if there might be evil now there would be good hereafter, and that for present and passing sorrow there would be a glorious day of rejoicing? To this end have I spoke Peace to the guilty man and Hope to the hardened! Not for him, nor for me, but for the countless millions of the Church—for the mighty hosts who look to her for succour and consolation! This I call courage!"

And he drew himself proudly up, and folded his arms on his breast with an air of haughty composure, while the girl, awed by his manner, and subdued by the impetuosity of his speech, gazed at him in half fear and wonderment.

"Tell me of your father, Lola," said D'Esmonde, in a low, soft voice, as he drew her low seat to his side.

"*He* was killed at Madrid; he died before the Queen!" said she, proudly.

"The death of a Toridor!" muttered the priest, mournfully.

"Yes, and Pueblos too, he is dead!"

"Not the little child that I remember——"

"The same. He grew up to be a fine man; some thought him handsomer than my father. My mother's family would have made a priest of him, but he chose the prouder destiny!"

"I cannot think of him but as the child—the little fellow who played about my knees; dressed like a matador, his long silky hair in a net."

"Oh, do not—do not speak of him," cried the girl, burying her face between her hands; "my heart will not bear those memories."

The priest's face was lighted up with a malevolent delight as he bent over her, as if revelling in the thought the emotions could call up.

"Poor little fellow!" said he, as if to himself. "How I remember his bolero that he danced for me." He stopped, and she sobbed bitterly. "He said that Lola taught him."

She looked up; the tears were fast coursing along her cheeks, which were pale as death.

"Eustace," said she, tremulously, "these thoughts will drive me mad; my brain is reeling even now."

"Let us talk of something else, then," said he. "When did you leave the 'Opera'—and why?"

"How can you ask? You were at Seville at the time. Have you forgotten that famous marriage, to which, by your persuasion, I consented; was this scheme only one of those unhappy events which are to be the seed of future good?"

The sneer made no impression on the priest, who calmly answered, "Even so, Lola."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried she, angrily; "to what end am I thus? Was I so base born and so low? Was my lot in life so ignominious, that I should not have raised my ambition above a fortune like this—the waiting-woman of one whose birth is not better than my own?"

"You are right, Lola, perfectly right, and with patience and prudence you will be her equal yet. Acton is an English noble——"

"What care I for that?" said she, passionately; "the marriage was a counterfeit."

"The marriage was a true and valid one."

"And yet you yourself told me it was not binding."

"I had my reasons for the deceit, Lola," said he, persuasively. "You were deserted and desolate; such widowhood would have brought you to the grave with sorrow. It were better that you should strive against misery."

"Even in shame?" asked she, scornfully.

"Even in shame, for the shame would be short-lived; but Lord Norwood is alive, and you are his wife."

"Lord Norwood! I have heard that name so often," said she, musingly.

"At Florence, of course, he was every night at the Mazzarini Palace, the same Gerald Acton you remember long ago."

"And he is a lord—an English noble?"

"And you are an English peeress, Lola. There is not a coronet more safe upon a titled head than I can make yours—can and will make," added he, slowly. "But you must be patient; I must now speak to you, Lola, of themes in which you can take no interest, and subjects of which you know nothing: but listen to me attentively, and hear me, for fortune has not thus thrown us together without a meaning.

"The hour is come, Lola, when heretics and infidels have determined on an attack of our faith; not as they have hitherto attempted, and with such signal failure, by the weapons of controversy and discussion, but by brute force; by the might of millions driven to madness from want and misgovernment. To avert this terrible calamity is now the unceasing thought of the Church. Some have counselled one thing, some another; some would go forth to the fight, trusting that, as of old, God would not forget his people; there are others who deem this course presumptuous and unwise. The hearts of kings are not as they once were—in their confessors' keeping. Our age and manners would send forth no crusade! The battle must be otherwise contested. You could not follow me, Lola, were I to tell you either of the perils or their antidotes. Enough that I say we must have trusty and faithful agents in every land of Europe, and in every rank in every people. From the secret whisperings of the Czar, to the muttered discontent of the Irish peasant, we must know them all. To this end have we laboured anxiously and eagerly for some time back, and already have we made great progress. From every Court of Europe we now receive tidings, and there is not a royal palace where our interests are unguarded. Some serve us for the glorious cause itself, some have their own price, some again are in our own hands from motives of self-interest or terror, but all are alike true. This princess—this Dalton—I destined for a duty of the same nature. Married to a a man of Midchekoff's wealth and influence, she might have done good service, but I scarcely dare to trust her; even at the sacrifice of herself she might fail me, and, although in my power, I cannot count upon her. Think, then, of my joy at finding you, one on whose fidelity I may hazard life itself. You can be all to me, and a thousand times more than ever she could."

"Your spy," said the girl, steadily, but without the slightest semblance of anger.

"My friend, my counsellor, my correspondent, Lola."

"And the price?"

"You may name it. If your heart be set on mere worldly distinction, I will prove your marriage, and although Norwood is not rich, his country never neglects the class he belongs to. Would you break the tie—the bond is in my keeping."

"I never loved him," cried she, passionately, "and you knew it. The marriage was one of those snares on which your mind never ceases to dwell."

"If you loved another, Lola?" said he, interrupting, and then waiting for her to finish her speech.

"And if I had," burst she forth, "am I credulous enough to fancy that your word can reconcile every difference of rank and fortune—that you can control destiny—and even coerce affection? No, no, Eustace; I have outlived all that!"

"Then were you wiser when you believed it," said he, gravely. "Now for his name."

There was a tone of almost commanding influence in which these last few words were uttered, and his dark full eyes were steadily fixed on her as he spoke them.

She hesitated to answer, and seemed to reflect.

"I ask no forced confession, Lola," said he, proudly, and rising at the same time from his seat. "In all the unreserve of our old affection, I told you *my* secret; *yours* is with yourself."

"But, can you——" She stopped.

"I can, and I will aid you," said he, finishing her sentence.

"There is the name, then!" cried she, as, with a passionate gesture, she drew a sealed letter from her bosom, and showed him the superscription.

D'Esmonde almost started; but, recovering himself in an instant, he said,—

"The address is not correct, Lola. It should be thus——" And taking a pen, he drew it across the last line on the cover, and wrote, instead, "Dewanpore Barracks, Calcutta." "We must talk together this evening," said he, restoring the letter, and, without more, withdrew.

CHAPTER X.

D'ESMONDE'S LETTER.

It will spare the reader a somewhat lengthy digression if we give him a peep at an extract from a letter written at this period by the Abbé D'Esmonde to a friend and fellow priest in Ireland. It was written on the very evening whose events we have just mentioned, and when fresh from the scenes of which he speaks.

The name or circumstances of the abbé's confidant have no interest for us, nor need we allude to him more particularly than by stating that he was one who took a prominent part in his country's politics, and was a well-known agitator, both in print and on the platform. The present moment might not be inopportune to show the injustice of that sneer so often passed upon men of this stamp, and which assumes that their whole lives are spent in the agitation of small and irritating questions of mere local interest—the petty intrigues of a village or a hamlet—and without knowledge or interest for those greater themes which stir the heart of all Europe. We must not, however, be led away from our purpose; but, leaving these inferences to our reader's appreciation, keep to the sober business of our task.

We have only to premise that D'Esmonde and his friend had been schoolfellows and college companions, and that the revelations made were in all the confidence of unbounded trust and security. Neither was the hazard of a post-office incurred, for the document was forwarded, with several letters from Rome, by a private hand—a priest, who twice each year performed the journey on a similar errand, and—shall we startle our reader if we add, in a spirit apart from all the caprices of fiction—still travels on the same mission.

After some apology for the time the epistle would be on the road, seeing that it should first return to Rome ere it began its journey northward, D'Esmonde next alludes to some private and personal matters, and some individuals of their acquaintance, and then proceeds :—

"It is not without much inconvenience that I am here at this moment, but my presence was necessary to neutralize the influence of this troublesome old countess, and who would fain stop, if she could, all these liberal movements ere they have developed their true meaning. You can have no idea how difficult is this task, nor with what persistent folly people go on repeating each other's 'platitudes' about 'timely checks,' 'scotching the snake,' and so forth. It is now upwards of half a century since Europe has seen a real political convulsion. A new lesson is wanting. I often used to hope that you of the West might be able to give it. I had great expectations of Chartism at one time. It possessed the due elements of mischief in abundance; it was infidel and hungry; but it wanted the great requisites—determination and courage. The example must come from the Continent, and, in one respect, it is so much the better. Your home disturbers would be necessarily the enemies of the Anglican Church, whereas *our* anarchists here are inseparably associated with Protestantism. This *coup* required some cleverness, but we at last accomplished it. Ronge's movement of secession gave the first opportunity; the Swiss troubles offered the second; a little more, and the *Bonnet rouge* will be the symbol of the Protestant faith. Mark the advantage of this; see the distrust with which every nation of the Continent will regard England and her constitution-mongering; look how they will be induced to associate her printed cottons with her Church, and connect the spread of her trade with the treacherous dissemination of her doctrines. So far, so good. And then, remember, that to all this anarchy and ruin the Church of the true faith alone offers any effectual opposition—the 'Platoon' for the hour of conflict; but to the priest must they come to consolidate the shattered edifice—to rebuild the tottering fabric of society. Men do not see this yet; and there is but one way to teach it—a tremendous lesson of blood and anarchy. This is in store for them, believe me.

"My great difficulty is to persuade these people to patience. They will not wait, as Napoleon did for the Prussians, till they were '*en flagrant delit;*' and yet, if they do not, the whole experiment goes for nothing. With all their hordes of horse, foot, and dragoons—their grape and canister—their grenades and rocket-batteries—they have not the courage of a poor priest. His Holiness is, however, doing better. He has taken the whole *au sérieux;* he has brought himself to believe that moderate reforms—what are they?—will satisfy the wishes of demagogue ambition, and that when he has lashed popular fury into full speed, he can check it at will. Of course you guess what will follow, and you already see what a busy time is before us. Oh, my dear Michel, I can stop here, and, closing my eyes, revel in the glorious future that must succeed! I see the struggle before me; and know that some good men, mayhap some great ones, will fall in it; but in the distance I see the dome of St. Peter's rising majestically above the clouds of battle, and the countless millions kneeling once more before its altars!

"I do not clearly understand you about Ireland, although I agree in the policy of putting the Protestant rebel in the foreground. A conflict ever so brief with the Government would be most useful. I have thought a good deal on the subject, and am convinced that nothing would awe England more than the impression of any foreign assistance being given to Irish insurrection, while it would lend to *your* loyalty the grand trait of nationality. This is a highly important feature. Remark how they are taunting us with being ultramontrane just now, and think what an answer this will be to the sarcasm! I am sure—that is, if you concurred with me—I could easily persuade some young fellows in this service to join the movement. As officers, and well acquainted with military details, they would have a formidable effect in English eyes. I have two or three in my mind already; one, a brother of my young princess, that fair damsel of whom I spoke in my last letter as my destined *chargé d'affaires* at St. Petersburg—a very difficult post to fill, and one for which I am by no means sure she will be adequate. When I reflect on the difficulties experienced by us in arriving at truth, we, who have the hearts of men so open before us, I am astounded at any success that attends a mere secular government. More than two-thirds of those with whom I live are, so to say, in my power; that is, their reputation and their fortunes; and yet I must make them feel this ten times a day to turn them to my account. Believe me the Holy Office was right: there is an inseparable bond of union between truth and a thumb-screw!

"Tell me if you wish for military aid: substantially, I am well aware, it would be worth nothing, but it might assist in pushing your patriots, who, I must own, are a cautious race, a step further. This Dalton boy is a thorough Austrian up to this—a regular 'God and the Emperor' soldier; but I have thrown more stubborn metal into the crucible, and seen it come out malleable.

"You ask about the 'converts;' and I must own that their defection is a greater slur on Protestantism than any matter of glorification to us. They are unceasing in their exactions, and all fancy that no price is too high for the honour of their alliance; not a shovel-hat amongst them who does not expect to be a 'monsignore' at least!

"Some, however, like my friend Lady Hester, are wealthy, and in this way reward the trouble they give us. On her security I have obtained a loan, not of the sum you wished for, but of a smaller amount, the particulars of which I enclose. I know not if you will agree with me, but my opinion is, that nothing should be expended on the Irish press. Its influence is slight, and purely local; reserve all your seductions for the heavier metal on the other side of the Channel, and who, however ignorantly they talk, are always heard with respect and attention.

"I cannot go over as you propose, nor, if I could, should I be of any use to you. You all understand your people, their habits and modes of thought, far better than we do, who have been fencing with cardinals, and sparring with the sacred college, for the last ten or a dozen years. Above all things, no precipitation; remember that your grand policy is the maintenance of that feverish condition that paralyzes every effort of English policy. Parade all your grievances; but rather to display the submission with which you bear them than to pray for their relief. Be touchy only for trifles; keep all your martyrdom for great occasions; never forget, that this time it is your loyalty! is to be rewarded. Adieu, my dear Michel. Tell his grace whatever you think fit of these, my opinions, and say, also, that he may rely on us here for withdrawing or confirming, as he pleases, any concessions he may deem proper to grant the English Government. We know his difficulties, and will take care not to augment them. As to the cardinal's hat, let him have no doubts; only beg him to be circumspect, and that this is not the time to assume it! If men would but see what a great cause we have, and how it is to be won by waiting—nothing more, Michel—nothing more, believe me, than mere waiting!

"All that you tell me, therefore, about titles, and dignities, and so forth, is premature. With patience you will be enabled to assume all, from which a momentary precipitation would infallibly see you repulsed. A few of your leading men still cling to the ruinous notion of elevating Ireland; for Heaven's sake cease not to combat this. It is the Church—the Church alone—for which we combat. Her difficulties are enough, without linking her fortune to such a sinking destiny! You have many able men amongst you, and they ought to see this proposition in its true light.

"You are right—though you only threw it out in jest—about the interest I feel for my little princess and her brother. It was the charity of a relative of theirs—a certain Mr. Godfrey—that first gave me the entrance into my career. He sent me to Louvain as a boy, and thence to Salamanca, and afterwards to Rome. He paid liberally for my education, and I believe intended, had he lived, to have provided handsomely for me. The story has an ugly ending; at least the rumours are gloomy ones; and I would rather not revive their memory. Here have I fallen into a sad track of thought, dear Michel; and now it is past midnight, and all is silent about me, and I feel half as if I ought to tell you everything, and yet that everything resolves itself into nothing; for of my actual knowledge, I possess not one single fact.

"Can you conceive the position of a man with a great, a glorious future before him—rewards the very highest his wildest ambition ever fancied—a sphere to exercise powers that he feels within, and but needing a field for their display? Picture to yourself such a man, and then fancy him tortured by one terrible suspicion—one damning doubt—that there is a flaw in his just title to all this—that some day or other there may rise up against him—he knows not how, or whence, or why—from the very earth as it were, a voice to say, 'You are disowned, disgraced—you are infamous before men!' Such a terrible hell have I carried for years within me! Yes, Michel, this ulcer is eating at my very heart, and yet it is only like a vision of evil—some mind-drawn picture, carried up from infancy through boyhood, and stealing on, year by year, into the prime of life, strengthening its ties on me like a malady.

"You will say this is a diseased imagination—the fruits of an overworked brain, or, not improbably, the result of an overwrought vanity, that would seek consolation for failures in the dim regions of superstition. It may be so; and yet I have found this terror beset me more in the seasons of my strength and activity than in those of sickness and depression. Could I have given a shape and colour to my thoughts, I might have whispered them in the confessional, and sought some remedy against their pain; but I could not. They flash on my waking faculties like the memories of a recent dream. I half doubt that they are not real, and look around me for the evidences of some change in my condition. I tremble at the first footstep that draws dear my door, lest the new comer should bring the tidings of my downfall!

"I was at Rome—a student of the Irish college—when this cloud first broke over me. Some letter came from Ireland—some document containing a confession, I believe. I was summoned before the superiors, and questioned as to my family, of which I knew nothing; and as to my means, of which I could tell as little. My attainments at the college were inquired into, and a strict scrutiny as to my conduct; but though both were above reproach, not a word of commendation escaped them; on the contrary, I overheard, amid their whisperings, the terrible word 'degradato!' You can fancy how my heart sank within me at a phrase so significant of shame and debasement!

"I was told the next morning that my patron was dead, and that, having no longer the means to support the charges of a student, I should become a 'laico;' in other words, a species of servant in the college. These were dreadful tidings; but they were short of what I feared. There was nothing said of 'degradation.' I struggled, however, against the hardship of the sentence—I appealed to my proficiency in study—the prizes I had won—the character I bore, and so on; but although a few months more would have seen me qualified for the priesthood, my prayer was rejected, and I was made a 'laico.' Two months afterwards I was sent to the convent of 'Espiazione,' at Ancona. Many of my early letters have told you the sufferings of that life!—the awful punishments of that gloomy prison, where all are 'degradati,' and where none are to be found save men stained with the foulest crimes. I was seventeen months there—a 'laico'—a servant of the meanest class—no consolation of study, no momentary solace in tracing others' thoughts to relieve the horrible solitude of my own. Labour—incessant debasing labour—my lot from day till dawn.

"I have no clue to the nature of my guilt. I declare solemnly before Heaven, as I write these lines, that I am not conscious of a crime—save such as the confessional has expiated—and yet the ritual of my daily life implied such. The offices and litanies I had to repeat, the penances I suffered, were those of the 'Espiazione!' I dare not trust myself to recall this terrible period—the only rebellious sentiment my heart has ever known sprang from that tortured existence. As an humble priest in the wildest regions of Alpine snow—as a missionary among the most barbarous tribes—I could have braved hardships, want, death itself; but as the 'degradato,' dragging out life in failing strength, with faculties each day weaker, watching the ebb of intellect, and wondering how near I was to that moping idiocy about me, and whether, in that state, suffering and sorrow slept! Oh, Michel! my hands tremble, and the tears blot the paper as I write. Can this ordeal ever work for good? The mass sink into incurable insanity—a few, like myself, escape; and how do they come back into the world? I speak not of other changes, but what hardness of the heart is engendered by extreme suffering—what indifference to the miseries of others! How compassionless do we become to griefs that are nothing to those we have ourselves endured! You know well that mine has not been a life of indolence, that I have toiled hard and long in the cause of our faith, and yet I have never been able to throw off the dreary influence of that conventual existence. In the excitement of political intrigue I remember it least; in the whirlwind of passions by which men are moved, I can for a time forget the cell, the penance, and the chain. I have strong resentments, too, Michel. I would make them feel that to him they sentenced once to 'degradation,' must they now come for advice and guidance—that the poor 'laico' can now sit at their councils and direct their acts. There is something so glorious in the tyranny of Rome, so high above the petty sovereignty of mere kings, soaring beyond the bounds of realms and states, crossing Alps and oceans, proclaiming its proud edicts in the great cities of Europe, declaring its truths in the silent forests of the Far West, stirring the heart of the monarch on his throne, thrilling the rugged breast of the Indian in his wigwam, that even to bear a banner in its ranks is a noble privilege. And now I come back to these children, with whose fortunes I feel myself—I know not how—bound up. They were related to this Mr. Godfrey, and that, perchance, may be the secret link which binds us. The girl might have won a grand destiny—she had beauty, grace, fascination—all that men prize in these days of ours; but there was no high ambition—nothing beyond the thirst for personal admiration. I watched her anxiously and long. There was a weak goodness about her heart, too, that gave no promise of self-sacrifice. Such, however, as she is, she is mine. As for the boy, I saw him yesterday for the first time; but he cannot be a difficult conquest. Again I hear you ask me, why can I turn from great events and stirring themes to think of these? and again I own that I cannot tell you. Power over every one, the humblest as the highest, the weakest in purpose and the strongest of heart—power to send forth or to restrain, to crush or to exalt—this is the prize of those who, like you and me, walk humbly, that we may reign proudly.

"And now, dear Michel, good-bye. I have made you a confession, and if I have told little, the fault is not mine. You know all my sentiments on great events—my hopes, and my anticipations. I must leave this to-morrow, or the day after, for there is much to do beyond the Alps. If kings and kaisers but knew as much as we poor priests, the coming would scarce be a merry Christmas with them.

"Yours, in all truth and brotherhood,
"MATHEW D'ESMONDE.

"Feast of St. Pancratius, Hof Thor, Vienna."

It was already daybreak when D'Esmonde finished his letter, but, instead of retiring to bed, he opened his window, and sat enjoying the fresh air of the morning. Partly from habit, he opened his book of "offices;" but his eyes wandered, even from the oft-repeated lines, to the scene before him—the spreading glacis—where, already, the troops were mustering for parade. "What a strange thing is courage!" thought he. "I, who feel my spirit quail at the very rumbling sound of a gun-carriage, have a soul to see all Europe convulsed, and every nation in arms, undismayed!"

* * *

CHAPTER XI.

THE CADET VON DALTON.

As Madame de Heidendorf's mornings were always passed in receiving the visits or answering the letters of her political acquaintances, Kate was free to spend her hours with Frank, exchanging confidences, and talking of that dear home from which they were more separated even by circumstance than by space.

The cadet had obtained leave for the entire day—an inconceivable favour in his eyes—and Kate was seated at her breakfast when he appeared. When they met the day before, Frank's undivided attention had been drawn to Kate herself—the change in her whole air and manner—that graceful dignity of mien which elevated his regard for her to a species of worship. Now, however, he had time to be struck with the accessories of her position—the gorgeous chamber, the splendid silver of the service, the rich liveries, everything which bespoke her proud and affluent condition.

"I almost start back with shame, Kate," said he, "if, in passing these great mirrors, I catch a glimpse of my humble figure, so unsuited does it seem to magnificence like this; nor can I help thinking that your household agrees with me. With all their respectful courtesy, they must wonder when they look on the brother of their princess."

"You know well, dearest Frank, that in your service the highest in the land must pass the ordeal of cadetship."

"Which means half an hour for an archduke, and a forenoon for a serene highness. Even Walstein took but a week to spring from the ranks to a lieutenancy; a month later saw him a rittmeister; and already he commands a regiment."

"What a young soldier to have caught up the complaining cant about slow promotion!" said Kate, laughing.

"Ten months a cadet, and not even made corporal yet!" sighed Frank. "To be sure, I might have been, had it not been for the stockhaus."

"And what may that be, dear Frank?"

"The prison, neither more nor less. When I came here, Kate, the nephew, or grand-nephew, of the Feld-Marschall von Auersberg, I thought it became me to assume something like style in my mode of life. My comrades told me as much, too; and as I had no difficulty in obtaining credit, I ran in debt everywhere. I lent to all who asked me, and gave away to many more. Every one said the Feld would pay one day or other, and I never confessed how poor we were at home. I know I was wrong there, dearest Kate; I feel that acutely now; but somehow the deception I began with others gained even more rapidly on myself. From continually talking of our Dalton blood, and our high position in our own country, I grew to believe it all, and fancied that some at least of these imaginings must be real. But, above all, I cherished the hope that promotion would come at last, and that I should live to be an honoured soldier of the kaiser.

"In the very midst of all this self-deception, the Feld returns to Vienna from a tour of inspection, and, instead of sending to see me, orders my colonel to his presence. I know not, of course, what passed, but report alleges that for an hour the old general harangued him in terms the most bitter and insulting. Now, my dear sister, the wrath poured out upon a commanding officer does not become diminished as it descends through the successive grades of rank, and falls at last on the private. For *my* misdemeanour the regiment was ordered away from Vienna, and sent to Laybach, in the very depth of winter, too. This could not help my popularity much among my comrades; and as I was now as destitute of credit as of means, you may fancy the alteration of my position—the black bread of the commissary, instead of the refined cookery of the 'Schwan;' the midnight patrol, in rain or snow-drift, in place of the joyous carouse of the supper-table; the rude tyranny of a vulgar sergeant, in lieu of the friendly counsels of an equal; all that is menial and servile—and there is enough of both in the service—

heaped upon me day after day; till, at last, my only hope was in the chance that I might ultimately imbibe the rude feelings of the peasant-soldier, and drag out my existence without a wish or a care for better.

"As if to make life less endurable to me, the officers were forbidden to hold intercourse with me; even such of the cadets as were above the humbler class were ordered not to associate with me; my turns of duty were doubled; my punishments for each trifling offence increased; and there I was, a soldier in dress, a convict in duty, left to think over all the flattering illusions I had once conceived of the service, its chivalry, and its fame!

"I wrote to Walstein, telling him that if I could not obtain my freedom otherwise, I would desert! A copy of my letter, I know not how obtained, was sent to my colonel, and I was sentenced to a month's arrest, a week of which I was to pass in irons. They now made me a rebel in earnest, and I came out of the 'stockhaus' more insubordinate than I went in. It would weary, and it would fret you, dearest sister, were I to tell all the petty schemes I formed of resistance, and all the petty tyrannies they brought down upon my head: the taunt of my 'gentle blood,' my 'noble origin,' my 'high descent,' being added to every cruelty they practised, till I was ready to curse the very name that associated me with this bitterness. They told me that a second desertion was always punished with death, and that even the attempt was accounted as the act. I resolved, then, to finish with this dreary existence, and I wrote a farewell letter to poor Nelly, telling her that, as I was certain of being taken, these were the last lines I should ever write. In this I repeated all I have now told you, and a vast deal more, of the hardships and indignities I had endured; and this, like my former letter, was sent back to me. Then came three months more of durance, after which I came out what they deemed a good soldier."

"Subdued at last!" sighed Kate.

"Not a bit of it. Like a Banat charger I had a kick in me, after all their teaching and training. I found out the lance-corporal of our company was the man who had discovered my letters. I sent him a challenge, fought, and wounded him. Here was another offence; and now the Minister of War was to deal with me himself; and I half fancied they would be glad to get rid of me. Far from it. The 'stockhaus' again, and short fetters, my wrist to my ankle, were the sovereign remedies for all misdeeds. In this plight I made my entrance into Vienna."

"Did you never think of Uncle Stephen all this while, Frank—never appeal to him?"

"Ay, Kate, and what was worse, *he* thought of *me*, for he had my punishment-rolls brought to him; and although, from some good-natured interference they did not forward more than a fourth of my misdeeds, there was enough to condemn me in his eyes, and he wrote, 'No favour to this cadet,' on the back of my certificate."

"Poor boy! so friendless and deserted."

"Persecuted by creditors, too," continued Frank, as, excited by the recital of his sorrows, he paced the room in a transport of anger; "fellows that never rested till they got me in their books, and now gave me no peace for payment. Out of three kreutzers a day, Kate—a penny English—I was to discharge all the debts of my extravagance, and live in style! A Dalton, well born and nurtured, in a position of ignominious poverty!"

"Not one to aid you?"

"Walstein was away in Bohemia with his regiment, and, perhaps, it were better so, for I had told him such narratives of our family, such high-flown stories of our princely possessions, that I could not have had the courage to face him with an avowal of the opposite. At last I did make a friend, Kate; at least one poor fellow took an interest in me, talked to me of home, of you and Nelly; mostly of her and of her curious carvings, which he prized almost as much as little Hans used. He sat with me many an hour under the trees of the Prater, or we strolled along in the shady alleys of the 'Au Garten,' and his companionship somehow always soothed and comforted me, for he was so stored with book learning, that he could ever bring out something from Uhland, or Richter, or Wieland, that suited the moment, just as if the poet had one in his mind when he wrote it. How often have I wished that I was like him, Kate, and had a mind like his, teeming with its own resources against sorrow."

"Tell me more of him, Frank dearest; I feel an interest in him already."

"And yet you would scarcely have liked him, if you saw him," said the boy, with a bashful and hesitating manner.

"Why not, Frank? His appearance might have been little promising, his face and figure common-place——"

"No, no; not that—not that. Adolf was good-looking, with a fine, clear brow, and a manly, honest, face; nor was his manner vulgar—at least for his station. He was a pedlar."

"A pedlar, Frank," cried Kate, growing scarlet as she spoke.

"Ay, I knew well how you would hear the word," said the boy; "I often used to fancy my high-bred sister's scorn if she could but have seen the companion whose arm lay around my neck, and who spoke to me as 'Thou.'"

Kate made no answer, but her cheek was crimson, and her lip trembled.

"You and Walstein were never out of my thoughts," continued Frank, "for I could fancy how each of you would look down upon him."

"Not that, Frank," said she, in confusion, "if he were indeed kind to you—if he were a true friend in that time of dreariness and gloom."

"So was he—with hand, and heart, and purse. And yet—confound that sense of pride, which poisons every generous movement of the heart, and will not let it throb in unison with one of humble fortune!—I never could get the Dalton out of my head. There it was, with that lumbering old fabric of an Irish house, our wasteful habits, and our idle dependants, all going down to ruin together; and instead of despising myself for this, I only was ashamed—at what, think you?—of my friendship for a pedlar! Many a holiday have I kept my barrack-room, rather than be seen with Adolf in the Volks Garten or the Graben. I liked to be along with him in the solitude of the Prater, or in our country walks; but when he asked me to accompany him to the café or the theatre, Kate—to some ordinary in the Leopoldstadt, or some wine cellar on the Danube, I used to feign duty, or actually take a comrade's guard, to avoid it. How meanly you think of me for all this, Kate. I see, by the flush upon your cheek, what shame the confession has given you."

Kate's confusion grew almost intolerable; she twice tried to speak, but the effort was above her strength, and Frank, who mistook her silence for rebuke, at last went on—

"You may guess, Kate, from what I have now told you, how much soldiering has realized all my early hopes and ambitions. I suppose times were different long ago."

"Of course they were, or Uncle Stephen would not now be a field-marshal."

As if in echo to her words, at this moment a servant, throwing wide the door, announced "The Feld," himself. Frank fell back as the old general advanced into the room, bowing with a courtesy that would have done honour to a courtier. He was dressed in the uniform of his rank, and wore all his decorations, a goodly mass, that covered one entire side of his coat.

Approaching Kate with a manner of admirably blended affection and respect, he kissed her hand, and then saluted her on either cheek. "Forgive me, my dear niece," said he, "if I have not been earlier to pay my respects, and say welcome to Vienna; but my note will have told you that I was on duty yesterday with the Emperor."

Kate blushed and bowed, for unhappily she had not read the note through. Frank's presence had made her forget all but himself. With all the gallantry of his bygone school, the old "Feld" proceed to compliment Kate on her beauty and grace, expressing in proper phrase his pride at the possession of such a relative.

"The Empress was the first to tell me of your arrival," said he; "and nothing could be more gracious than the terms in which she spoke of you."

With a thrill of pleasure Kate heard these words, and greedily drank in every syllable he uttered. Not alone her betrothal to the prince, but all the circumstances of her future destiny, seemed to be matters of deep interest to the court, and poor Kate listened with wonder to the Feld as he recounted the various speculations her marriage had given rise to. She little knew within what a narrow circle the sympathies of royalty are forced to revolve, and how glad they are of anything to relieve the tedious monotony of existence. One most important question had already arisen, since the Empress had expressed a wish that the young princess should be presented to her; but Madame de Heidendorf refused her permission, on the ground that she had not yet been presented at the court of the Czar. All the difficulties of the two cases, the arguments for either course, the old general deployed with an earnestness, that if it at first amused, at last deeply interested Kate. The flattering sense of self-importance giving a consequence to trifles, which, if told of another, she would have smiled at.

"I was desirous of gratifying the Empress before I saw you, my dear niece," said he, taking her hand; "but you may guess how much greater is my anxiety now that I have learned to know you. It will be, indeed, a proud day for the old field-marshal when he shall present one of his own name and family, so gifted and so beautiful. A thorough Dalton!" added he, gazing on her with rapture.

"How glad am I, sir, to see that all the distinctions your great career has won have not effaced the memory of our old name and house."

"I have but added to it another as noble as itself," replied he, haughtily. "Others have given their energies to degrade our ancient lineage. It is to be your task and mine, Madame la Princesse, to replace us in our rightful station."

Kate instinctively sought out Frank with her eyes, but could barely catch a glimpse of his figure within a recess of a window. More than once the poor cadet had meditated an escape; but as the door was on the opposite side of the room, he saw discovery would be inevitable. With a graceful courtesy the old Feld asked after Father and Nelly, expressing his wish to see and know them, in terms which plainly conveyed to Kate his utter ignorance of their station and habits.

"As a younger son myself, without the ties of fortune, I may be permitted to doubt how far the head of a distinguished house has a right, from any considerations of personal gratification, to reside away from his country, madame. I must own that my nephew's conduct in this respect has not met my approval. I have not felt free to tell him so, our intercourse being for so many years interrupted; but you will say as much for me. Let him know that the great names of a nation ought not to die out in people's memories."

"You are aware, sir," said Kate, timidly, "that papa's means are not as they once were; circumstances of economy first suggested his coming abroad."

"A reason that always has appeared to me insufficient," said the other, sternly. "He could have reduced his establishment at home—fewer hunters—less splendid banquets."

"Hunters and banquets!" sighed Kate; "how little he knows of us!"

"Here, I see nothing but the best fruits of his system," said he, kissing her hand with gallantry; "no cost could be accounted too much that aided the attainment of such perfection. I am too old a courtier not to distinguish between mere native gracefulness and that more polished elegance which comes of refined intercourse. My niece is worthy to be a princess! But your brother——"

"Oh! what of dear Frank?" cried she, eagerly.

"Simply this, madame: habits of wasteful expenditure have unsuited him to the stern realities of a soldier's life. With his fortune and his tastes, he should have sought service among those popinjays that English tailors make lancers or hussars of. He might have won the laurels that are gathered on Hounslow or St. James's Park; he might have been distinguished in that barbaric warfare you call an Indian campaign; but here, in this empire, where soldiering means discipline, self-denial, hardship, endurance!—I was eight years a cadet, madame, twelve a sous-lieutenant. I saw the decoration I should have received given to another. The Dienst Kreutz I had won was refused me, because I had not served twenty years; and yet, by accepting these and hundreds like them as the inevitable necessities of the service, I am what now you see me."

"And if Frank will be but patient——"

"He may be a corporal within a year, madame," said the Feld, gravely, and with the air of a man who had advanced a somewhat bold pledge.

"But he must be an officer within a week, sir," said Kate, taking the general's hand within her own. "I seldom ask favours, and as seldom are they refused me. The chivalry of Austria will surely suffer no attaint from one whose distinction it is to be *your* relative, and a Dalton. Nay, dear uncle, this is the first, the very first request I have ever made of you. It would not be meet for me to say, in *your* presence, what a guerdon is his name for his good conduct."

"You are too sanguine, madame. You do not know this boy."

"Every thought of his heart I know—every hope that sustains him. He himself has told me all his shortcomings."

"His insubordination?"

"Yes."

"Extravagance?"

"Yes."

"His days of imprisonment?"

"Yes."

"His arrests in irons?"

"All—everything; and what are they, save the boyish excesses of one who, carried away by high spirits, and buoyed up by the flattering sense of relationship to a great and distinguished name, has been led on to follies by the mere native warmth of temperament. It is easy to see how little he thought of himself, and how much of his uncle!"

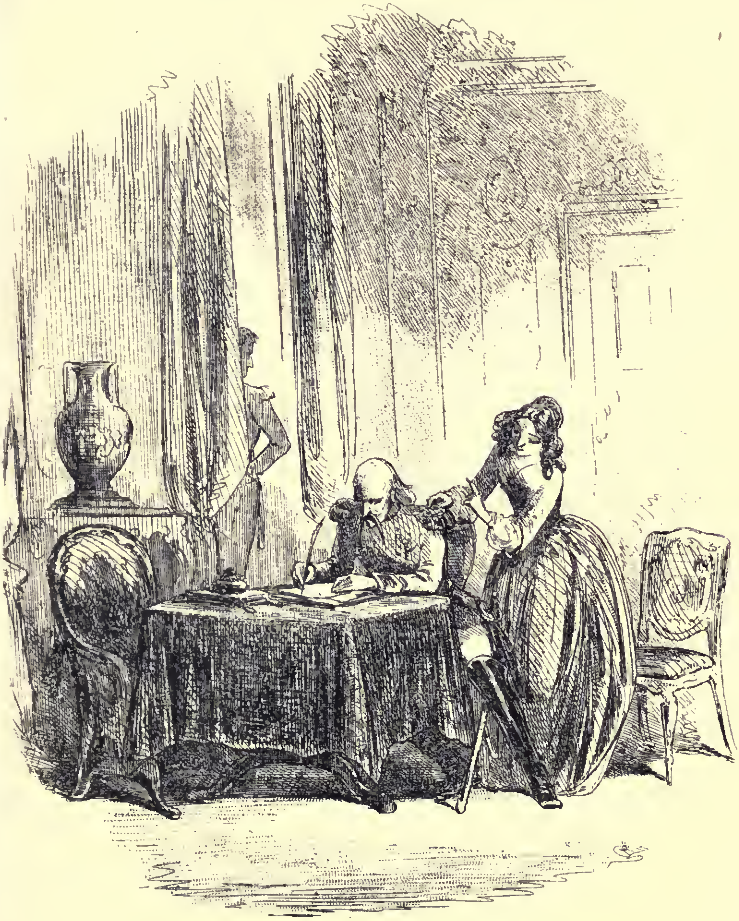
The old general shook his head dubiously.

"There, dear uncle," said she, pressing him into a seat before a table with writing materials, "take that pen and write."

"Write what, dear child?" said he, with a softness very different from his usual manner.

"I know nothing of the forms, nor the fitting phrases. All I want is that Frank should have his sword-knot."

"You have learned the proper word, I see," said he,



The Writing - Lesson.

smiling, while he balanced the pen doubtingly in his fingers. "The colonel of his regiment is an imperial prince."

"So much the better, uncle. A Hapsburg will know how to reward a Dalton."

"So, then, we begin thus," said the old general, whose half-suppressed smile showed that he was merely jesting with her eagerness: "'Imperial Highness,—The Cadet von Dalton, whose distinction it is to be the grand-nephew of a very old soldier, and the brother of a very young princess——'"

"Nay, surely, this will not do," said Kate.

"'A very young princess,'" resumed the Feld, as he continued to write, "'who, confiding in her own captivations and your highness's gallantry——'"

"This is but jesting with me, uncle, and I am serious," said she, poutingly.

"And am not I serious, too, madame?" cried he, laying down the pen. "If I ask promotion for a boy whose whole career has been one infraction of discipline, whose services are all inscribed in the Provost-Marshal's return, is it not better that I should press his claims on the merits of others than dwell upon his own misconduct? My dear child," said he, affectionately, "there are natures that cannot bear a too sudden prosperity, as there are individuals who cannot endure too sudden changes of climate. Our Dalton blood has a little of this same infirmity. Shall I tell you how I won my first step in the service? I was at Höhenkirchen when Moreau began his celebrated retreat through the defiles of the Schwartzwald. The company in which I served as a simple corporal occupied a large farm-house, on an elevated plateau, above the road to Schweinfurt. We could see for miles along the valley, and our position was taken up to observe the movement of the enemy, and immediately report when his advanced guard came in sight. Our orders also were to hold the place as long as we were able, and delay as much as possible the enemy's advance; in other words, if we could retard him by half a day, at the sacrifice of our party, our duty would be well done. These unpleasant situations arise now and then in war; but one comfort is, they seldom occur twice to the same man!

The captain who commanded us was an old officer, who had borne his slow promotion with many a heart-burning, and now resolved, come what might, to win his grade. Without waiting for the enemy, he took a patrol party, and set out to meet them. We never saw them again! Our lieutenant, alike impatient, determined on a *reconnaissance.* He had scarcely been gone half an hour, when a quick rattling of fire-arms told us that he was engaged with the enemy. One man alone returned to tell us that the rest had fallen, and that the enemy was approaching in force. The command now devolved on me. I had been four times passed over in promotion, distinct acts of service left unnoticed, and my claims as much ignored as if I was the veriest dolt. I will not pretend to say that I bore these disappointments without pain; but they taught me one lesson at least, 'that duty is above all consideration of self.' I well knew what was expected of us, and resolved, if possible, to fulfil it. I prepared at once for a stout resistance—a hopeless, of course, but an obstinate one. Well, I will not imitate the tardiness of the duty by a similar prolixity. We held the farm for two hours, during which the roof was twice on fire from the enemy's shells; and when, at length, they stormed the place, our defence was reduced to eight men, commanded by a corporal with two shot-wounds in his chest. We were made prisoners, and carried away to Strasburg, from whence I was exchanged under a cartel, and came back to my regiment as a lieutenant. Had I merely sought promotion, madame, and followed the dictates of ambition and not of duty, I had perhaps fallen like the others. It was in the very forgetfulness of myself lay my prosperity and my reward."

Kate's eyes sought out Frank, resolved on one effort more for her object, but the boy was gone. He had contrived to slip away unseen during the conversation, and was now waiting at the corner of the street, impatient for the general's departure, to return to his sister.

"I am to have the honour of dining in your company to-day," said the Feld, rising to take leave. "Let me hope that my obduracy will not weaken your regard for one so proud of being your uncle."

"No, uncle," said she, "and chiefly since I do not believe in the obduracy, and have full faith in the affection."

With every testimony of regard, they now took leave of each other, and the general retired as Kate betook herself to her own room.

She had scarcely left the apartment when the archduke entered it. Madame de Heidendorf had told him that the princess was there with her uncle, and he came expressly to see her. "Gone again!" exclaimed he; "am I never to see this mysterious beauty?" while he threw his eyes around the room. "What's this addressed to myself here," added he, as he caught sight of the paper which the Feld had half written. "To his Imperial Highness the Archduke Franz Albrecht, commanding the Eleventh Regiment of Infantry." Rapidly glancing over the few lines, he at once caught their meaning, and detected the playful spirit in which they were conceived, "The fair princess must not be disappointed in her opinion," said he, laughingly, as he took up the pen and wrote: "Too happy to anticipate the unexpressed wish, the archduke appoints Cadet von Dalton to a lieutenancy in the Hussars of the Würtemberg Regiment," and signing his well known initials at the foot, he sealed and addressed the paper to the Princesse de Midchekoff. This done, he left the house, passing as he went a young cadet, whose military salute he scarcely noticed, nor knew the anxious heart for whose happiness he had just provided.

Young Frank stood respectfully at the salute as the prince passed, and then bounded away to rejoin his sister. The drawing-room, however, was empty, and it was by mere chance that he saw the letter, on which the address was scarcely dry. Taking this with him, he hastened to her room. "A letter for you, Kate," cried he, "and with a royal seal, too!"

"Poor Frank!" said she, coming out to meet him. "That I should have such tidings for you! The Feld is obdurate and unyielding. He fancies that there is no road to honour save the old track he has trod himself."

"I knew as much, Kate. Had I stayed longer in the room, I could not have refrained from bursting out to say, 'Hold, sister dearest; not the best grade in all the service is worth so much solicitation. I'll carry the musket while I must, and the day they make me an officer I'll smash the sword across my knee and leave them!'"

Kate broke the seal of the packet without answering this passionate speech, and then, with a cry of joy, exclaimed, "Here it is, Frank! The prince himself has given you the rank, and in the hussars, too!"

"Let me see it," cried the boy—"let me see it." And tearing the paper from her hand, he read it again and again. "I scarce know—I can scarce believe this real; but a prince's word—a royal promise, Kate, is surely sacred."

"Of that there can be no doubt, Frank."

"And I am a hussar and an officer," said he, with a burst of delight. "I'd not change with the kaiser this minute, Kate."

"My dear, dear Frank!" said she, passing her arm around his neck.

"And to owe it all to you, my sweet Kate! If anything could enhance to pleasure of this piece of fortune, it is this fact. And such a regiment, Kate—The Prince Paul's. The turappé all one mass of gold, and the chako splendid, and their horses the true Hungarian breed—the native horse crossed with the Arab! I feel already as if I were in the saddle, and careering wildly about. Oh, Kate, what glorious news!"

Again and again he embraced her in his ecstasy, and she, hiding her head upon his shoulder, tried to suppress the burst of emotions which filled her heart, for she thought at what a price she purchased the power she wielded.

They sat long with hands close locked beside each other—neither speaking—each travelling his own road of thought; and how wide apart they lay!

* * *

CHAPTER XII.

VIENNA.

We cannot afford to linger in Vienna, nor speak of the week—the most brilliant of all her life—Kate passed there. It was the first burst of that ambition which had so long taken possession of her, and she saw herself, at length, in all the pride of her station, and her beauty the object of a hundred flatteries.

Fêted at the court, distinguished by the special attentions of the princes, most courteously received in all the society of the most exclusive capital of Europe, the whirl of pleasure and excitement as effectually precluded thought as it defied reflection. Hitherto she had seen the world only as a dependant, or at least as something appertaining to Lady Hester, in whose caprices she was bound to share, making partnery, as it were, in all her likings and dislikings; but now, she was become the centre around which all these attentions revolved, and her own will was the directing impulse of every action.

Of all the cities of the continent, Vienna was most remarkable for almost instinctively adopting the tone of its court in respect to a distinguished visitor. There was something like intuition in the way in which they guessed the feeling of royalty, and as quickly made it their own.

The restricted limits of the first society, of course, made this practicable, as well as the fact that all belonging to it were more or less engaged in the service of the Emperor. Kate Dalton was now to enjoy this flattery, and find herself, wherever she went, the special object of attention.

At the Hof Theatre—where they played her favourite operas; at the great reviews in the Prater, at the balls of the palace, or the *déjeûners* of Schönbrunn, she seemed the occasion of the fête. and to do *her* honour all appeared assembled. Carried away by the triumphant delight of pleasure so associated with power, she either forgot at times the price at which her greatness had been purchased, or was disposed to still the beatings of her heart by the thought, "My destiny is chosen; it is too late to look back." To have grieved over her lot, besides, would have seemed an utter selfishness, seeing that she was the means of dispensing such happiness to all her family. Her poor father placed once more in comfort; Nelly free to follow the dictates of her charming fancy, without the alloying sense of toil; and dear Frank, in all the exuberant joy of his promotion, eternally reminding her that she was his patroness. The quick clatter of his charger's hoofs in the courtyard, the clank of his sabre as he ran up the stairs, were but the glad prelude to his daily outpouring of gratitude! Ay, "to be sorry now, would be but selfish."

Such was the philosophy in which she wrapped herself; and day after day the feeling gained strength within her. It was true there were moments when all the sophistry gave way, and her affections flowed full and strong in the deep channels of her heart. Then, indeed, she saw the emptiness of all this gorgeous parade—how little it gave of real happiness—how seldom it ever called forth one generous feeling, or one high desire, and she wished the fates had dealt otherwise with her. At times, she almost longed for the humble home, in all its poverty, with nothing but Nelly's bright smile and gentle voice to cheer its solitude! It may have been this conflict—for conflict it was—that gave to her demeanour a certain calm dignity, which, in the critical estimation of society, elevated her high above any charge of frivolity or capriciousness. She was a thought graver, perhaps, than her years; but the feeling imparted an indescribable grace to one whose beauty was the very type of brilliancy. After all, these were but passing clouds; nor did she ever suffer herself to recur to the past, save when wayward memories would obtrude uncalled for.

At last a letter came from Lady Hester; and, although not a ong one, it called up thoughts that all her endeavours could not efface from recollection. There were, once again, all the old familiar names with which she used to be so conversant.

Lady Hester, however, was much changed: all the capricious irritability of the fine lady had given place to a kind of importunate piety. She had grown "devote," and her life a string of religious observances. After dwelling complacently on the self-imposed round of her mortifications and penances, she went on:

"D'Esmonde has just returned, and delights me by saying that you are quite free from any contagion as to the errors of the Greek Church. Of course, outwardly, you must conform; even if Midchekoff did not insist, his countrymen would; but he says that St. Ursula is the sure resource in such cases, and mentions the instance of a nun who took lessons in Spanish from the Devil, and, by the aid of the blessed Ursula, was nothing the worse.

"I told Jekyl, who left this on Friday, to send me an image of St. Ursula, that I might forward it to you; but the careless wretch has sent me a statuette of Fanny Elssler by mistake. He discovered his error, however, and has written me a most humble letter, mentioning, by the way, that he was doing a 'Novena' for penance, and danced the polka all the preceding night with a sharp peg in the sole of his foot. With all his oddity, there is a great deal to like in him.

"I have only once heard from the Onslows; their conduct has been too shocking; they are not ruined at all, but got up the story, I verily believe, just to destroy my nerves. Sir S. is living in Ireland, at that place with the horrid name your father used to talk of, with Sydney; and George has gone to India, a major, I think, in some cavalry regiment. At Grounsell's kind suggestion, I have been cut off with a miserable allowance of fifteen hundred a year; but even with this I am content. St. Brigitta, of Cleves, lived on hard peas, and never wore anything but an old sack for the last seventeen years of her life; and Célestine has got a charming pattern of a capote, *à la* Cistercine, which, when made of white cashmere, will be perfectly simple and very becoming. I wear my hair now always in bands, and very low on the face. D'Esmonde says I'm the image of the Madonna of

Dominichino, which you may remember, I always preferred to Raphael's.

"Cardinal Bruschetti has been spending a few days here, and I cannot tell you the charm I have felt in his society, contrasted with the frivolous dissipation I have been used to. He is so suave, and so gentle, so persuasive, without importunity, and so conciliating withal. Not the least austerity about him; but at times actually gay! He quite approves of my having kept Fripponi as my cook. 'A change of cuisine,' said he, 'involves a change of digestion, a change of temperament, and a moral change;' alterations far too important to be incurred at once. This is so far pleasant, as certainly the man is an admirable artist. His Eminence said yesterday that the salmi of ortolans was a dish fit for the Pope. We drive out, or row, every day, on the lake, and I shall be quite lonely when he leaves this. I am curious to know if you remember a bust of him in the Vatican. He was, and indeed is, a remarkably handsome man; and his leg has been modelled I can't say how often. He asks me to whom I am writing, and begs you will remember him in your prayers; how touchingly simple, is it not?

"I ventured last night on a bit of importunity, and asked his Eminence a favour. That poor dear Jekyl, you know, is miserably off. His family, all so wealthy, he says, only allow him a few hundreds a year; and with his generous habits and wastefulness this must be actual want. Well, I asked the cardinal if there might not be some way of sending him out as a missionary—like St. Vincent de Paul. I'm certain he'd not like the dress nor the bare feet, but he'd be so happy with those charming Tonga islanders, who, such is their zeal, that they actually give four and five scalps for a wax image of the Virgin. His Eminence hinted that there might be difficulties, and he'd think of it!

"Your prince passed through here on Tuesday, on his way to Naples; he wants to see 'La Giovina' dance in that new ballet of 'Paradiso.' They say she is perfectly lovely. The prince asked after you, and said something about its not being etiquette for him to write to you, or that you should write first, or, I really forget what; you know the slurring way he has of talking, and how he walks away before he has finished. He's worse than ever, I think, or probably it is *I* that have less patience with him now since you are gone!

"Jekyl told me—in strict confidence, remember—that M. did not stand well with his court, and that there would be nothing wonderful in the Czar's refusing his leave for the marriage. What you ought to do in that case I cannot conceive; a convent, I suppose, would be the only thing. After all, it might probably have been as well if you had taken poor George. The estate is still a good one, and he has some amiable points in his character, and he certainly loved you. I never told you the thousand confessions he made me, nor his entreaties for my intercession, but there is no harm now in letting you hear them. It is, however, impossible to say with whom one could live happily! George begged of me to send him every letter you wrote to me, and of course you can use the knowledge of the fact at your discretion.

"Now, for two little commissions, my dear Kate, and I have done. I want you to get me a case of Tokay from the Teleki estate—mind, not Palfi's, which, his Eminence says, wants the oily flavour. Some of the archdukes will manage this for you. I'm certain your long eyelashes have got further than this already. The second is to send me a haunch of Bohemian vension—Schwartenschild's, if possible. The cardinal says that fat is become as scarce as true piety, and that a well-fed buck is as rare as a good Christian!

"Are they wearing their corsages pointed at the back?—not that I care, dearest, for I am above such vanities, but Célestine wishes to know. When you receive the St. Ursula, keep her in your own room, and with her face to the west; and so good-by, and, with many prayers, believe me,

"Affectionately yours,

"THEODOSIA,

"Late HESTER ONSLOW.

"Could you, by any chance, send me a good miniature of yourself?—perhaps you guess for what purpose. Haselquist's oil picture is too large for what I want; and, besides, is really not like you. Even with all its imperfections his Eminence sits looking at it for hours of an evening, and says he can scarcely fancy anything lovelier. I do not ask after Madame de H., for I hate the woman. His Eminence has told me such things of her! But of course you can only make the best of it for the present, and get on as well as you can.

"D'Esmonde tells me that Frank is a fine boy, and very good-looking, but fearfully dissipated; but I suppose the service is like the Life Guards with us—and what can one expect? *A propos* to this, Norwood has written to me twice some inexplicable nonsense about you, which I have not replied to. What does he mean by 'treating a flirt like a flounce?' Jekyl says that the police have stopped his passport, or he should have been after you to Vienna. This is quite unintelligible to me, and I don't know why I repeat it."

Never did a frivolous letter give more serious thought, nor bring gloomier reflections, than did this epistle to Kate Dalton. Her mind dwelt far less on the paragraph which concerned her own future, than on that which spoke of George—his devoted affection and his enduring sorrow! And so it was true that he loved her! He had even confided the avowal to another, and asked for aid and counsel. Why had he then concealed it from herself? Was the fault hers? Had her own conduct been the reason? Had her encouragement of any other estranged him, or was the teaching of the society in which she moved the reason? Poor fellow! how unfairly had she treated him—even to that very last incident of their last meeting!—and now, they were to meet no more! No! death itself could not more effectually separate them than did space and destiny. Even this she felt to be better, far better, than the chances of renewed intimacy in the world. Lady Hester had not told her why she had never divulged her secret; still less to what end she revealed it now, when the knowledge must be only misery. The mention of Norwood, and the vague half threat connected with his name, gave her but little uneasiness, since her mind had but space for one absorbing thought—George loved her! There was the sum of every reflection; and all the world around her, in its splendour or its brilliancy—the tortuous paths of political intrigue—the quiet byways of home-affection—the present and the future—were all as nothing when weighed against this one thought.

If her first impression had been to blame Lady Hester for revealing the secret, her second was to thank her with her whole heart. She remembered D'Esmonde, too, and the reasonings by which he accompanied the delivery of the letter; and she felt that this consciousness was a blessing of which no vicissitude could rob her—that come what might of disappointment or sorrow in life, here at least, in her heart of hearts, was one hoarded treasure to compensate for all. If there were but one to whom she could confide her secret—with whom she could talk over her sorrow—she thought that she would be contented. To Nelly, she dared not; to Frank, she could not speak of it; what, then, of Nina? Alas! it was no longer a secret to *her!* Nina had seen the picture, and although nothing in her manner betrayed the slightest consciousness, Kate knew her too well not to feel herself in her power.

Nina's demeanour, however, exhibited nothing of insolent triumph; on the contrary, her manner was gentle, even to submissiveness, and something almost affectionate seemed to mingle with the feeling in which she fulfilled her duties. Kate remarked this, and only needed the courage to take advantage of it. At first, the very idea of Nina's consciousness was torture; but day by day this terror grew weaker, till at last she actually wished that the moment of explanation was over, and that she could pour out all her griefs before her. "She may have loved, unhappily, herself; and if so, will pity me. In any case, a frank avowal on my part will show that I knew nothing of his heart, and but little of my own, till 'too late.' We are never to meet again," and so-and-so; in fact, with many a casuistry, she satisfied herself that mere memory could never be a sin—that there could be nothing very wrong in looking back as often as the future seemed lowering and gloomy. It is hard to say if there might not have been some leaven of "pique" in these reasonings. The prince, according to Lady Hester, if he had not entirely forgotten, was already indifferent about her. Some uncertainty of ceremonial prevented his writing, or hearing from her; and at this very moment he was following out the ordinary life of dissipation which he led before. Why care for him —why even endeavour to nourish an affection that must be blighted in the end? Besides, her marriage was never one of inclination; Lady Hester had been most frank in explaining the prince's appreciation of it. As to her own reasons for the step, she knew them too well!

All that Kate had seen of life in her Florence experiences told her that such cases were the ordinary events of the world. Few were happily married—disparity of age, inequality of condition, incompatible tempers, and a hundred other causes, were ever at work. Lady Hester used to tell her that nobody was ever satisfied with their "married lot; the good and right-minded only pined under it, the less scrupulous proclaimed their dissatisfaction to the world, and asked for sympathy!" These were the two categories that comprehended all her theory. Now Kate was quite resolved to be one of the former class; but she saw no reason why she ought not to have one "confidante" of her cares.

With all the force of these persuasions she could not get over the awkwardness of the confession, and would have given worlds that Nina herself would take the first step. That simple-minded creature, however, appeared dead to every hint or suggestion; she could never see the drift of any remark, save in its most obvious sense, and actually pushed Kate's temper to the last entrenchment of patience by pure stupidity. "Is it possible—can it be that I am deceived—that she has not recognized the miniature?" thought Kate. "Is my secret still in my own keeping?" As this thought struck her, everything appeared to confirm it—the girl's manner, devoid of every trait of imperiousness, and actually humble to servility. "Oh, if I could but be sure of this—if I could know that I could bury both my shame and my sorrow together!" In this vacillating state of suspense—one day, all hope and confidence, the next, terror and dread, she lived on, till the period drew nigh for their departure from Vienna.

Madame de Heidendorf had delayed beyond her intention, in the hope of receiving some French news; and Kate eagerly watched the post for some tidings from home —for home it still was, in every feeling of her heart.

"No letters again, Nina?" said she, despondingly, as the maid entered the room.

"None, madame."

"Have your friends forgotten you, Nina, as well as mine appear to have done?"

"Nina has but few friends, madame; and still fewer would think of writing to her?"

"Poor Nina!" said Kate, affectionately; and the blood rushed to the girl's face at the words, and her eyes flashed with an expression of sudden passion.

"No pity, madame—no pity!" cried she, with a voice full of emotion, "or I may forget myself—forget myself and you also!" And with these words she hurried from the room, without waiting for more. Kate sat shocked and abashed by the girl's violence, and yet neither daring to reprove her nor even remonstrate with her. What abject slavery was this to feel! How mean did she seem to her own heart!—what rottenness was within that gilded splendour by which she was surrounded! Where was the ambitious envy with which she once looked up to the rich and powerful, now? Where that intense desire to be among the great and the titled? and with whom would she not have changed conditions, even to Nina herself?

It is not weak of heart and low of courage that one should face the great journey of life. Its trials and crosses, even to the most fortunate, demand all that we can summon of hope and of energy. And yet so was it that she was about to begin the road—the long and dreary road—before her! As she sat thus musing, a great noise was heard from the street without. She arose and opened the window. The whole Platz was crammed with people, eagerly talking and gesticulating. A surging, waving motion, too, seemed to sway them, and at length she could detect that they were slowly proceeding onward towards the gate of the city. The deep roll of a drum then turned her attention, and, in the far distance, she saw the glancing bayonets of an infantry column as they advanced.

Military spectacles are of too frequent recurrence in Vienna to create much surprise or excitement, and yet, evidently, from the looks and gestures of the people, they were both present here. The band of a regiment struck up the national hymn of Austria, and as the proud notes swelled into the air, a dark body of Tyrolese Jägers poured into the Platz. Still there was no enthusiasm of the people. They listened to the loyal sounds in cold apathy. To the Tyrolese succeeded a Grenadier battalion, after which came a long dense column of infantry of the line, their knapsacks on their backs, and their bread rations strapped above them. Behind these was the artillery, the long-tailed black horses giving a solemn look to the procession, as its clanking sounds fell mournfully on the ear. From the wide Platz they now moved on, and passing out of the Körtner gate, defiled into the "Glacis." But a moment before and that immense space was empty; and now, from every avenue of the city, troops came pouring in like rivers to the sea. The black-plumed hunters from Tyrol, the gigantic Croat Grenadiers, the swarthy Bohemian Cuirassiers, and the white-cloaked dragoons of Austria—all were seen advancing and forming as if in battle array. While Kate's eye ranged eagerly over the field in search of the blue uniform of the Hungarians, Madame de Heidendorf entered the room with an open letter in her hand.

"What can this mean?" asked Kate anxiously. "It is surely not a mere review?"

"Far from it, madame," said the countess, imposingly. "The great drama is about to begin. News has come that Italy is in open revolt, and fresh troops are to be despatched thither with all speed. Twelve thousand are to march to-day, eight more to-morrow."

"And Frank——"

She stopped, abashed by the disdainful expression of Madame de Heidendorf's face.

"Your brother's regiment, madame, will form part of the force, and he will, of course, contribute the importance of his presence! How happily constituted must be the mind that can turn from the grand theme of a whole nation's destiny to the petty fortunes of a corporal or a sous-Lieutenant."

"And yet so it is," replied Kate, boldly; "dear Frank is nearer to my heart than all that I see yonder. Oh yes, madame," cried she, replying to the glance of scorn the countess bestowed, "it is quite true. Mine is an ignoble spirit. My affections are linked with lowly objects—would that my ambitions had never risen above them!"

What reply Madame de Heidendorf might have given to this speech, so much more daring than she had uttered before, there is no knowing, when Frank burst into the room, and clasped his sister in his arms.

"I have but a moment, Kate, and we are off—off to Italy;" and then, seeing the countess, the boy bowed courteously, and apologized for his abrupt entrance. "Count Stephen has got the command, and placed me on his staff."

"I hope you may merit this proof of his confidence, sir," said Madame de Heidendorf, haughtily.

"Frank will be a brave soldier, madame," broke in Kate. "He is a Dalton."

"He must be true as well as brave. Fidelity is needed now as much as valour."

"And who will dare to question mine?" cried Frank; and then, as if impatient that he should have been led away from a dearer theme, he placed his arm within Kate's, and drew her towards the window. "I had so much to say to you, my dearest sister. I have been thinking of nothing but you—and—and—what you told me. I would break off this match—it is not too late—you are only betrothed."

"Oh! no, no, Frank—do not give me such counsels. I am pledged in word and bound in honour. I have taken a solemn vow."

"But you have been deceived—I know you have; enough that I see such a woman as that your companion. I tell you again, you must break it off."

"I cannot—I cannot!"

"Then, by Heaven! I will do it myself. It surely is not for all the glitter of this state and pomp that you would sell you affections? These gauds have not corrupted you already? No, no, I read you better than that. Listen to my plan, then—do not leave this till you hear from me. If this lady—I do not know her name—insists on your departure, be as peremptory, and say that you wish to see your family first. You are not a slave, and cannot be coerced."

"I will hear no more of this, Frank—the very thought is maddening. No, no, Frank; if you would be my friend, teach me how to fulfil my duty, my sworn, pledged allegiance—do not seek to shake my faith, nor make me less resolute in honour."

"It is, then, as I feared," cried he passionately; "these cursed bribes *have* bought you. Oh! it is not thus Nelly would have been won."

"I know it—I know it well!" cried she bursting into tears; "but I never was like *her*."

"But you were, and you are, dearest," said he, kissing her forehead, "our own sweet Kate, that we were all so proud of. Oh! forgive me if I said what could hurt you, for I would pour out my heart's blood to serve or to save you."

There was a mournful emphasis on the last two words, which bespoke their deep meaning; and now, locked in each other's arms, they wept bitterly.

"As the Field-Marshal von Auersberg has just ridden into the palace, his aide-de-camp ought probably to dry his tears, and receive him," said Madame de Heidendorf, as she sailed proudly out of the room.

"You heard that, Kate?—you heard what she said to *me?*—think, then, what kindness and sympathy she will feel for *you!*" said the boy, as he dashed his hand indignantly against his forehead. "Was I not right about these Russians?"

"Come, Frank, let us go to Uncle Stephen," said Kate, trying to smile and seem at ease; and hand-in-hand they descended the stairs together.

The drawing-room into which they now entered was filled with officers of different arms of the service; among whom Count Dalton stood conspicuous, both from his size and the soldierlike character of a figure that not even old age seemed able to impair.

"How provoking, my sweet niece," said he, taking Kate's hand between both his, "now to part, just as I was learning the happiness of knowing you. Here are all these gentlemen grumbling and complaining about leaving their homes and families, and yet I'll wager there is not one amongst them carries away a heavier heart than I do. Come into this room, my dear; let us have five minutes together." And Kate took his arm, while he led her forward. Madame de Heidendorf, meanwhile, seated herself on a sofa, and summoned the most distinguished officers of the party to inform her as to all that was going forward.

It was one of her favourite affectations to be deeply versed in military tactics; not that she acknowledged herself deficient in any art or science, but soldiering was her strong point. She therefore questioned and cross-questioned these unhappy gentlemen at great length.

"You have no mortars? Do I hear you aright, Colonel Ivabowsky? No mortars?"

"None, madame."

"And how, may I ask, do you mean to reduce Milan to ashes?"

This was a very puzzling question; and she repeated it in a still more commanding tone.

"Perhaps that may not be deemed desirable, madame," modestly insinuated another officer.

"Not desirable, sir? You said not desirable. Why, really I shall begin to fancy I ought to go to school again in military matters. Are you aware, sir, it's the very centre of these wretches; that it is fed from Switzerland and Piedmont with all that is infamous in political doctrine? Milan must be bombarded, sir!"

The colonel bowed courteously to an opinion expressed with so much authority.

"You'll find at least that the field-marshal will be of my opinion," continued she. "As a military position, it is worth nothing."

"But as a capital city, madame?" mildly interposed the colonel.

"The old story," said she, contemptuously. "Women and children!"

"Most legitimate objects of protection, I trust, madame."

But she turned contemptuously away, as if controversy with such an adversary was beneath her.

"We have three rocket-batteries, madame," interposed a staff officer, desirous of offering himself to her notice.

"I hope you will use them with effect, sir. I envy you the pleasure of seeing them plunging amidst that vile mob it is the fashion to call the people now-a-days."

"I hope we shall do our duty, madame," said an old, stern-looking major, who felt little flattered at this interference.

"I should like to see more chivalry—more ardent devotion in the defenders of a monarchy," said the countess. "I can understand coldness in the lower classes, but that the well born and the noble should be apathetic and slow to move, is beyond my comprehension."

"Bey'm Blitzen," retorted the major, "that is not bad! Here we are going to shed our blood for the kaiser, and we are told that it is not enough, without we are born counts and barons."

"What is it, Heckenstein?" said Count Dalton, as he entered the room, and laid his hand familiarly on the other's shoulder. "I have seldom seen you look so angry."

But the old soldier turned away without a reply.

"Madame de Heidendorf," said the old general, "I know not what you have said to offend an old and tried servant of the emperor—a soldier of Wagram and Austerlitz—a faithful follower, when the fortunes of this great empire were at the lowest. But, believe me, these are not times to flout loyalty and despise fidelity."

"The times are worse than I thought them," said the countess, "when these principles have infected such men as Count Dalton. I had certainly hoped that his young relative would have received a very different lesson at his outset in life, nor can I wonder if such teachings end in evil. Here is the archduke. How I wish his highness had come a little earlier."

As she spoke, the prince entered, with all the careless ease of his ordinary manner. It was impossible to detect from his countenance whether he regarded the event as a serious one, or simply one of those popular commotions which are ever occurring in a large empire.

"I know you are discussing politics, or something akin to them," said he, laughingly. "Madame de Heidendorf has her 'cabinet countenance' on, and Auersberg is looking as fierce as a field-marshal ought to do when contradicted. Come, general, present me to the princess. It is an honour I have been long desiring. How tired you must be of all this, madame," said he to Kate. "Such wise people as will not talk gossip—such high-minded souls as never will condescend to say a good thing, or hear one, are insupportable." And, seating himself beside her, he rattled on about Vienna, its society, and its pleasures, with all the ease and flippancy of a young fashionable of the day, while, in an attitude of deep respect, not unmixed with a dash of impatience, stood the old count before him.

"What does Auersberg want to tell us?" said the prince at last, looking up at the old general's face.

"To say, adieu, your royal highness."

"You don't go with the troops, surely?" said the duke, laughing.

"At the head of my own regiment, your royal highness."

"Ah, by the bye, the Auersbergs are in your brigade. Very proper that. And is this my *protégé?*" said he, taking Frank's arm, and drawing him forward. "There's your best example, sir. Be only as good a soldier, and the name of Dalton will be a title of nobility amongst us. Good-bye, lieutenant. General, farewell. Give that *canaille* a lesson quickly, and come back to us as soon as you can."

Kate rose and followed Frank out of the room. For a few seconds they were closely locked in each other's arms, without speaking. "Oh, Frank dearest! when are we to meet again—and how?" cried she, passionately.

"In pride and happiness, too, Kate," said the boy, joyfully. "I have no fears for the future. But what is this, sister dearest—gold?"

"Do not refuse me, Frank. It is the only happiness, left me."

"But this is the Russian's, Kate."

"No, believe me, it is not. Count Stephen has made me his heir; he has given me all his fortune. Even good luck can come too late!" said she, with a sigh.

"Do not leave this till I write to you, Kate. I will do so very soon—that is, if I can; but these are anxious times. You know, Kate"—here the boy whispered in a voice low and tremulous from agitation—"you know, Kate, that I only left the ranks a couple of days ago. I can tell then, better than all these great folk, what soldiers think and say; they are not as they used to be. Lead them against the Frenchman, and they will fight as they have ever fought; but if it be to fire on their own townsfolk—to charge through streets where they lounged along, hand-in-hand with the people like brothers—they will not do it."

"This is very alarming, Frank. Have you told the Count?"

"No: nor would I for worlds. What! betray my comrades, and be called on before a court-martial to say who said this, and what man said t'other?"

"But could you not, at least, give him some warning?"

"And be ordered from his presence for the presumption, or told that I was a rebel at heart, or such tidings had never been uttered by me. The old Feld would as soon believe that this earth was cut adrift to wander at hazard through all space, as that treason should lurk behind an Austrian uniform. It would be an evil hour for him who should dare to tell him so."

"Oh, Frank, how terrible is all this!"

"And yet do I not despair; nay, Kate, but I am even more hopeful for it; and, as Walstein says, if the Empire halt so long behind the rest of Europe, she must one day or other take a race to come up with it."

"And is Walstein a—a——" She stopped.

"No; he's very far from a Democrat or a Republican. He's too well born, and too rich, and too good-looking, to be anything but a Monarchist. Oh, if you but saw him! But, hark! there are the trumpets! Here come the Würtemburgs;' and there's my charger, Kate. Is he not splendid? A Banat horse, all bone and sinew."

"How I should like to have been a man and a soldier," said she, blushing deeply.

"There, that's Walstein—that's he with the scarlet dolman!" cried Frank; "but he's coming over—he sees us. No! he's passing on. Did you see him, Kate?—did you remark him?"

"No, Frank, dearest; I see nothing but *you*, my own fond brother." And she fell upon his neck, weeping.

"Herr Lieutenant!" said a hussar, with his hand to his cap.

"Yes, I'm ready—I'm coming," cried Frank. And with one long, last embrace he tore himself away, springing down the stairs in mad haste.

"Madame de Heidendorf is good enough to say she will come and see the troops defile from the Glacis," said the archduke to Kate, as, still overwhelmed with sorrow, she stood where Frank had left her. "Perhaps you would do us the honour to come also?"

Kate accepted the invitation at once, and hurried to her room for a bonnet.

"Not that one, Madame la Princesse," said Nina, eagerly; "the yellow with black lace, rather. The national colours will be a flattery to his royal highness."

"What a coquette you are, Nina."

"And how irresistible would madame be, were she to condescend to be even a little of one," said Nina, smiling.

"Perhaps I may yet," said Kate, half sighing as she spoke; and Nina's dark eyes sparkled as she heard her. "But what do you mean by coquetry, Nina?" asked she, after a pause.

"It may mean much, madame, or very little. With such as I am, it may be a rose-coloured ribbon; with Madame la Princesse, it may be the smile that wins royalty. Coquetry, after all, is a mere recognition of admiration. An old Spanish dramatist says, 'That a glance from bright eyes is like the hoisting of an ensign to acknowledge a salute.'"

"How you run on, Nina, and how ashamed I feel when I catch myself afterwards thinking over your words."

Nina laughed merrily at this confession, while she opened the door for Kate to pass out. In a moment after, Kate was seated beside the archduke, and Madame de Heidendorf followed in another carriage.

The archduke was neither very good-looking nor agreeable. His manners were not remarkable for any peculiar elegance, nor was there in his air and bearing any of that special charm which very often seems the prerogative of royal personages; and yet it would have been excessively difficult to persuade Kate of all this, as she drove along the streets crowded with uncovered heads. The clank of the escort that rode at either side, the quick roll of the drum and the rush out of the guard to salute as he passed, created a sensation of pleasure in her mind like the enjoyment of a delighted child. Oh, if Nelly could but see her now!—if dear old papa were but there to look at her; and Hanserl—little Hans—that loved the Hapsburg House as he loved the Patron Saint of his own village!

It was, indeed, worth something to taste of splendour like this! And now she issued forth into the spacious Glacis, glittering with thousands of bayonets, and trembling under the tramp of the moving squadrons. The whole line saluted as he drove slowly past, band after band taking up the sounds, till the proud hymn of Austria filled the whole air. The soldiers cheered, too, loud and long, for his imperial highness was beloved by the army, and, like all his house, was a thorough soldier.

"You have never seen our troops under arms before!" said he, with a proud elation in his look. "They are fine fellows, and faithful as they are brave." He was about to say more, when the dull roll of a drum was heard along the line, and the deep-voiced command from regiment to regiment ran, "Alle nieder zum Gebet," and, at the word, every weapon was lowered, and every head drooped forward in prayer. Not a sound—not a whisper—was heard in that mighty host, till, after the expiration of some minutes, the command once more summoned them to arms. Then came the word "March!" and with a cheer that made the very air vibrate, the troops set out for "Italy."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MARCH.

Is there any enthusiasm like that of a young soldier setting forth on his first campaign? High in heart and hope, what can equal the glorious picture his fancy draws of fame and honour? Where will his imagination stop in creating scenes of heroic daring or deeds of noble chivalry? In such a mood Frank Dalton rode along amongst his comrades, with whom at once he became the greatest favourite. Explain it how one will, or give up the problem in despair, but there is no denying the fact, the Irish character has more of high spirits, more buoyancy, than that of any continental people. Deriving pleasure or amusement from incidents that others accept as common-place, making even the rubs and collisions of life subservient to his playful humour, the Irishman has resources of ready wit and brilliant fancy you may seek for in vain amongst Germans, or Italians, or even Frenchmen.

The contrarieties of nature, the contradictions of character, that puzzle politicians and drive political economists half crazy, are delightful elements of social intercourse; and what makes the "nation" ungovernable very frequently renders the "individual" the most easy-tempered and manageable man of his set. What a boon was it, then, to the gloomy, thoughtful Bohemian, to the dreary German, or the fitful, passionate nature of the wild Hungarian, to chance upon one who had moods of mind to suit them all, and stories of amusing thought that none of them possessed. Frank was the delight of the regiment; and whether he rode in the front or in the rear a group was sure to be gathered round him, listening with eagerness to his stories, or enjoying the quaint drollery which every passing object or event was sure to elicit.

Emerging at a bound from the petty annoyances and vexatious cares of his humble position, with all its harassing of debt and poverty, the boy was almost wild with delight at his newly-won freedom. A thorough Dalton, he forgot every strait and difficulty he had passed through, and thought only of the present, or so much of the future as his hopes embellished. Kate's generosity, too, made him feel rich, and he was not unwilling to be thought so. That passion for ascendancy, that over-eagerness to make a fair figure before the world, no matter at what material sacrifice, or at what heavy cost, was bred "in his very bone;" but so inveterately Irish is it that if the nation should ever be visited by the income-tax, there is not a man in the land who will not over-estimate his means for the sake of the boast to the collector!

A wealthy comrade, if he be but free-handed, is sure to be popular on a march. The fastidiousness that would stand aloof from more formal attentions, gives way here to the chances of the road; and civilities that would elsewhere imply obligation, are now the mere accidents of the way.

To the honour of the Austrian service be it said, "Tuft-hunting" is not to be found there. The officers of a regiment embrace representatives of every class of the empire, from the haughtiest names of Europe down to the sons of the humblest peasant; and yet the *camaraderie* is perfect. Very probably there is nothing more contributes to this than the absence of all secrecy as to each man's resources. The prince is known to be rich; the son of the little burgher, or Amtmann, is equally known to be poor. Nothing is expected from any above his means, and no disgrace attaches to narrow fortune. If, therefore, Frank was not surrounded by shrewd-witted adventurers, eager to make the most of his extravagance, he was not the less exposed to the flattering acknowledgments his generous habits evoked, and the vanity that comes of being distinguished amongst one's fellows. To be sure this was his father's failing, and his grandfather's before him! Frank, then, entertained all the officers of his squadron on the march, practising a hundred little devices and surprises for them. Now, it was a cold luncheon, laid out in a wood at noonday; now, it was a smoking supper in a village, where even the generals were fain to munch "commissary rations." Even the soldiers of his "Zug" participated in this liberality, and many a flask of wine was pledged to the health of the young lieutenant. As if to make him perfectly happy, the old count, his uncle, was obliged to hurry forward, and thus Frank was relieved from the constraint of the only one whose presence could have imposed reserve.

It was in the boundless freedom of this liberty, unchecked by prudence, unrestrained by fear of consequences, Frank's lavish nature knew no bounds. He wrote to Vienna for horses of high price; he ordered carriages and liveries to be sent after him. The very surprise his extravagance excited was an incense that he gloried in. How many a generous nature has been wrecked by stupid admiration! how many a true heart been corrupted by the vulgarity of notoriety!

"What will the Dalton do next?—what has the fellow in his head now?" were surmises that he never heard without delight, and stimulated him to new efforts to create astonishment. Ireland, too, so remote from all their knowledge—that far-away island—furnished many a theme for wonder, and he repeated, with ecstasy, several of his father's stories of their former greatness and the barbaric splendour in which they lived. How easy is self-deception, and what a strange cheat is that a man can practise on himself; but so was it; he actually forgot the long years of their obscure poverty, all their hard trials and distresses, the penury of their daily life—everything!—and could only think of Kate in all her splendour, and himself in every indulgence of his fancy. And yet he loved his father and Nelly too,—loved them both dearly. He would have given worlds that the old man could have seen him as he rode at the head of his men. He often felt his eyes grow dim as he fancied the burst of delight it would have caused him. And poor Nelly! how he pictured her features glowing with admiration, and yet trembling from agitation, for he thought of all her warnings.

"It is a singular fact, that in the short interval before the tremendous events of the last great European convulsion, the aristocratic influence seemed at its very highest point. Never in each state of the Continent were the claims of family more regarded, nor the sway of proud names more submissively recognized. Like the fever-flush before death, it deceived many who beheld it! In the eyes of his astonished comrades, young Dalton perfectly represented this character. Rich, well born, brave, and eccentric, his seemed indeed an enviable lot in life. Happy for him if the deception had stopped short with them! Unluckily, however, it extended to himself, and he at last believed every fiction that his own brain suggested.

In this wild delirium of the day-dream he rode along through the deep glens and valleys of the Tyrol, along the banks of the rapid Inn, through the glorious vale of Meran, and at last gained the great road which, through Trent and Rovoredo, debouches on the Lago di Guarda. Here a dispatch from Vienna overtook them, with orders that a small party should be sent off under some officer of intelligence to examine the condition of the Stelvio pass, the highest of all the alpine roads of Europe, and which, crossing from the South Tyrol, descends directly into Italy by the Lake of Como.

Although it was still early, fresh snows were said to have fallen on that elevated road, and it was an important question whether it were longer practicable for the transit of artillery. Frank was delighted to be selected for this duty—a separate command, no matter how small or insignificant, had something adventurous and independent about it that pleased him. There was a dash of peril, too, in the enterprise, for already the Valteline and the Brianza were said to be overrun by bands of patriot troops, raising contributions for the war, and compelling others to take up arms.

Frank's instructions were, however, to examine and report upon the road, and, avoiding all possible collision with the enemy, either to unite with any Austrian brigade he could reach, or, if compelled, to retire upon the Tyrol. Some of his comrades pitied him for being selected for this lonely duty, others envied; but all regretted his departure, and with many a warm wish for a speedy meeting, and many a pledge of affection, they saw him depart on his enterprise.

In the small "Zug" of twenty men under his command, there was a young Hungarian cadet, who, although of good family and birth, Frank remarked never to have seen by any chance in society with the officers. Ravitzky was a handsome, daring-looking fellow, with that expression of mingled sadness and intrepidity in his face so peculiarly Hungarian. He was the best horseman in the regiment, and a thorough soldier in his look and carriage. It had often puzzled Frank why a youth with such advantages had not been promoted. On the one or two occasions, however, on which he asked the question, he had received evasive or awkward replies, and saw that the inquiry was at the least an unpleasant theme among his comrades.

Frank Dalton was well pleased at the opportunity now offered to know something more of this young soldier, almost the only one under his command who could speak any other language than Hungarian. Ravitzky, however, although perfectly respectful in his manner, was cold and reserved, showing no desire for an intimacy at which he might be supposed to have felt proud. Without actually repelling, he seemed determined to avoid nearer acquaintanceship, and appeared always happier when he "fell back," to exchange a few guttural words with his comrades, than when called to "the front," to converse with his officer.

Frank was piqued at all this; he saw that neither his rank, his supposed wealth, nor his assumed position imposed upon the cadet; and yet these were the very claims all his brother-officers had acknowledged. Amazed at this wound to his self-love, he affected to forget him altogether, or only remember him as one of the soldiers in his command. So far from seeming displeased, Ravitzky appeared more at his ease than before, and as if relieved from the worry of attentions that were distasteful to him. This conduct completed the measure of Frank's indignation, and he now began actually to hate the youth, on whom he practised all the possible tyrannies of military discipline. These Ravitzky bore without seeming to be aware of them, discharging every duty with an exactitude that made punishment or even reproof impossible.

It is likely that if Frank had not been corrupted by all the adulation he had so lately received—if his self-esteem had not been stimulated into an absurd and overweening vanity, he would have read this youth's character aright, and have seen in him that very spirit of independence which once he himself sought to display, albeit by a very different road! Now, however, he received everything in a false light—the reserve was insolence, the coldness was disrespect, the punctuality in duty a kind of defiance to him. How often he wished he had never taken him; the very sight of him was now odious to his eyes.

Austrian troops enjoy so much of freedom on a march, that it is difficult often for the most exacting martinet to seize opportunities for the small tyrannies of discipline. Frank's ingenuity was now to be tried in this way and, it is but fair to confess, not unsuccessfully. He compelled the men to appear each morning as smart as if on parade—their carbines in the bandoleers, and not slung at the saddle—he inspected every belt, and strap, and buckle, and visited even the slightest infraction with a punishment. Ravitzky accepted all this as the ordinary routine of discipline, and never, even by a look, appeared to resent it. Tyranny would seem to be one of the most insidious of all passions, and, if indulged in little things, invariably goes on extending its influences to greater ones.

At Maltz a new occasion arose for the tormenting influence of this power, as the military post brought several letters from Vienna, one of which was addressed to the cadet Ravitzky. It was about a week before Frank was indignantly complaining to his sister of the shameless violation of all feeling exhibited in opening and reading every soldier's letter. He was eloquently warm in defending such humble rights, and declaimed on the subject with all the impassioned fervour of an injured man; and yet so corrupting is power, so subtle are the arguments by which one establishes differences and distinctions, that now he himself saw nothing strange nor severe in exercising this harsh rule towards another.

He was out of temper, too, that morning. The trim and orderly appearance of the men gave no opportunity of a grumble, and he strutted along on foot in front of his party, only anxious for something to catch at. On turning suddenly around, he saw Ravitzky with his open letter before him, reading. This was a slight breach of discipline on a march where infractions far greater are every day permitted; but it offered another means of persecution, and he called the cadet imperiously to the front.

"Are you aware, cadet," said he, "of the general order regarding the letters of all who serve in the ranks?"

"I am, Herr Lieutenant," said the other, flushing deeply, as he saluted him.

"Then you knew that you were committing a breach of discipline in opening that letter?"

"As the letter is written in Hungarian, Herr Lieutenant, I felt that to show it to you could be but a ceremony."

"This explanation may satisfy you, sir; it does not suffice for me. Hand me your letter."

Ravitzky grew scarlet at the command, and for an instant he seemed as though about to dispute it; but duty overcame every personal impulse, and he gave it.

"I see my own name here!" cried Frank, as the one word legible to his eyes caught him. "How is this?"

Ravitzky grew red and pale in a second, and then stood like one balancing a difficulty in his own mind.

"I ask again, how comes a mention of me in this document?" cried Frank, angrily.

"The letter, Herr Lieutenant, is from my cousin, who, aware that I was serving in the same troop with you, offered to make me known to you."

"And who is this cousin with whom I am so intimate?" said Frank, proudly.

"Count Ernest Walstein," said the other, calmly.

"What, he is your cousin? Are you really related to Walstein?"

The other bowed slightly in assent.

"Then how is it, with such family influence, that you remain a cadet? You have been two years in the service?"

"Nearly four years, Herr Lieutenant," was the quiet reply.

"Well, four years, and still unpromoted; how is that?"

Ravitzky looked as if unable to answer the question, and seemed confused and uneasy.

"You have always been a good soldier. I see it in your 'character roll;' there is not one punishment recorded against you."

"Not one!" said the cadet, haughtily.

"There must, then, be some graver reason for passing you over?"

"There may be," said the other, with a careless pride in his manner.

"Which you know?" said Frank, interrogatively.

"Which I guess at," said Ravitsky.

"Here is your letter, cadet," said Frank, handing it back to him. "I see you will not make a confidant of me, and I will not force a confession."

Ravitzky took the letter, and, saluting with respect, was about to fall back, when Frank said,—

"I wish you would be frank with me, and explain this mystery."

"You call it mystery, sir?" said the other, in astonishment. "You are an Irishman born, and call this a mystery?"

"And why not? What has my birth to do with it?"

"Simply that it might have taught the explanation. Is it truth, or am I deceived in believing that your nation is neither well received nor kindly met by the prouder country with which you are united; and that, save when you stoop to blush at your nationality, you are never recognized as claimant for either office or advancement?"

"This may have been the case once to some extent," said Frank, doubtingly, "but I scarcely think such differences exist now."

"Then you are more fortunate than we," said Ravitzky.

"But I see men of your nation the very highest in military rank—the very nearest to the Sovereign?"

"Theirs be the shame, then," said Ravitzky. "There are false hearts in every land."

"This is a puzzle to me I cannot comprehend."

"I'll tell you how to understand it all, and easily too, Herr Lieutenant. Take this letter and forward it to the Council of War; declare that Cadet Ravitzky acknowledged to yourself that he was a Hungarian, heart and soul, and, save the eagle on his chako, had nothing of Austria about him. Add, that a hundred thousand of his countrymen are ready to assert the same; and see if they will not make *you* an Ober-lieutenant, and send *me* to Moncacs for life." He held out the letter as he spoke for Frank to take, and looked as proudly defiant as if daring him to the act.

"You cannot suppose I would do this?"

"And yet it is exactly your duty, and what you took a solemn oath to perform not a week back."

"And if there be such disaffection in the troops, how will they behave before an enemy?" asked Frank, eagerly.

"As they have always done; ay, even in this very campaign that now threatens us, where men are about to strike a blow for liberty, you'll see our fellows as foremost in the charge as though the cause at stake was not their own."

"Ravitsky, I wish you had told me nothing of all this."

"And yet you forced the confession from me. I told Walstein, over and over, that you were not suited for our plans. You rich men have too much to lose to venture on so bold a game; he thought otherwise, and all because you were an Irishman!"

"But I have scarcely ever seen Ireland. I know nothing of its grievances or wrongs."

"I believe they are like our own," said Ravitzky. "They tell me that your people, like ours, are warm, passionate, and impatient; generous in their attachments, and terrible in their hatred. If it be so, and if England be like Austria, there will be the same game to play out there as here."

Frank grew thoughtful at these words: he recalled all that the Abbé D'Esmonde had said to him about the rights of a free people, and the duties of citizenship, and canvassed within his own mind the devoirs of his position; meanwhile Ravitzky had fallen back to the men and taken his place in the ranks.

"They'll not compromise me before an enemy," thought Frank; "that I may rely on." And with this trustful assurance he mounted and rode slowly forward, deeply sunk in thought, and far less pleasantly than was his wont to be. From all the excitement of his late life, with its flatteries and fascinations, he now fell into a thoughtful mood, the deeper that it was so strongly in contrast to what preceded it. The greater interests that now flashed across his mind made him feel the frivolity of the part he had hitherto played. "Ravitzky is not older than I am, and yet how differently does *he* speculate on the future! *His* ambitions are above the narrow limits of selfish advancement, and the glory *he* aims at is not a mere personal distinction."

This was a dangerous theme, and the longer he dwelt upon it, the more perilous did it become.

The snow lay in deep drifts in many parts of the mountain, and the progress of the little party became daily slower as they ascended. Frequently they were obliged to dismount and lead their horses for miles, and at these times Frank and Ravitzky were always together. It was intimacy without any feeling of attachment on either side, and yet they were drawn towards each other by some strange mysterious sympathy. Their conversation ranged over every topic, from the great events which menaced Europe to the smallest circumstances of personal history; and in all Frank found the cadet his superior. It was not alone that his views were higher, more disinterested, and less selfish, but his judgments were calmer and better weighed.

"*You* want to be a count of the Empire, and a grand cross of every order of Europe," said Ravitzky one day to Frank, at the close of a rather warm discussion. "*I* want to see my country free, and live an humble soldier in the ranks." This bold avowal seemed to separate them still more widely, and it was plain that each regarded the other with distrust and reserve. It was after some days of this distance that Frank endeavoured to restore their intimacy by leading Ravitzky to speak of himself, and at last ventured to ask him how it came that he still remained a cadet, while others, in every way inferior to him, were made officers.

"I have refused promotion some half-dozen times over," said the other. "As a kaiser-cadet, my time of service will expire in a few months hence; then I shall be free to leave the service. Were I to accept my grade as an officer, I should have to take an oath of fidelity to the Emperor, which I would not, and pledge myself to a course that I could not do."

"Then they probably know the reasons for which you have declined promotion?"

"Assuredly they can guess them," was the curt reply.

"You are a strange fellow, Ravitzky, and I scarcely understand you."

"And yet there is nothing less a mystery than my conduct or my motives," rejoined he, proudly. "My father is a noble high in the service and confidence of the Emperor, and although a Magyar by birth, is Austrian by choice and predilection. My sympathies are with my countrymen. In obedience to his wishes I have entered this service; in justice to myself, I mean to quit it when I can with honour."

"And for what, or where?" asked Frank.

"Who knows?" said he, sorrowfully. "Many of our nation have gone over the seas in search of a new land. Already we are almost as destitute of a home as the Poles. But why talk of these things, Herr Lieutenant? I may be led to say that which it would be your duty to report—you ought, perhaps, as it is, to denounce me. Have no fears; my life would always be spared; my family's fidelity would save *me*. This is one of the glorious privileges of birth," cried he, scornfully. "The 'fusillade' will be the sentence for one of those poor fellows yonder, but you and I are too well born for justice to reach."

"Assuredly *I*'ll not quarrel with the privilege!" said Frank, laughing.

"And yet, if I were as rich and as great as you are," said Ravitzky, "it is exactly what I should do! With your fortune and your rank you want nothing from king or kaiser. Who, then, would not strive for the higher rewards that only a whole nation can confer?"

Frank blushed deeply at the allusion to his supposed wealth, but had not the courage to refute it. He, however, sought an opportunity to turn the conversation to other channels, and avoided for the future all mention of every theme of politics or party. The mischief, however, was done; he brooded for ever in secret over all the Hungarian had told him; while old memories of fresh wrongs, as narrated by his father long ago, kept recurring and mingling with them, till not only the themes excluded other thoughts, but that he felt the character of his own ambition changing, and new and very different hopes succeeding to his former ones.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SKIRMISH.

At last they reached the summit of the Stelvio, and began the descent of the mountain; and what a glorious contrast does the southern aspect of an Alpine range present to the cold barrenness of the north! From the dreary regions of snow, they came at length to small patches of verdure, with here and there a stunted pine-tree. Then the larches appeared, their graceful feathery foliage chequering the sunlight into ten thousand fanciful shapes, while streams and rivulets bubbled and rippled on every side—not ice-bound as before, but careering along in glad liberty, and with the pleasant music of falling water. Lower down, the grass was waving as the wind moved on, and cattle were seen in herds revelling in the generous pasture, or seeking shelter beneath the deep chestnut-trees, for already, even here, the Italian sun was hot. Lower again came dark groves of olives and trellised vines; long aisles of leafy shade traversing the mountain in every direction, now, curving in graceful bends, now, in bold zigzags, scaling the steep precipices, and sometimes hanging over cliffs and crags, where not even the boldest hand would dare to pluck the ruddy bunches!

Beneath them, as they went, the great plain of Lombardy opened to their view—that glorious expanse of wood and waving corn, with towns and villages dotting the surface; while directly below, at their very feet as it were, stretched the Lake of Como, its wooded banks reflected in the waveless water. What a scene of beauty was that fair lake, with its leafy promontories, its palaces, and its Alpine background, all basking under the deep blue of an Italian sky; while perfumes of orange groves, of acacias and magnolias, rose like an incense in the air, and floated upwards!

Even the hard nature of the wild Hungarian—the rude dweller beside the dark-rolling Danube or the rapid Theiss—could not survey the scene unmoved; and, dismounting from their saddles, the hussars moved stealthily along, as if invading the precincts of some charmed region. Frank was in no haste to leave so picturesque a spot, and resolved to halt for the night beneath the shade of some tall chestnut-trees, where they had sought shelter from the noonday sun. Como was at his feet, straight down beneath him was the wooded promontory of Bellagio, and in the distance rose the Swiss Alps, now tinged with the violet hue of sunset. Never was there a scene less likely to suggest thoughts of war or conflict. If the eye turned from the dark woods of the Brianza to the calm surface of the lake, everything wore the same aspect of peaceful security. Figures could be seen seated or walking on the terraces of the villas; gorgeously-decked gondolas stole over the bay, their gold-embroidered ensigns trailing lazily in the water. Equipages and troops of horsemen wound their way along the leafy lanes; not a sight nor sound that did not portend ease and enjoyment.

With all Frank's ardour for adventure, he was not sorry at all this. His orders to fall back, in case he saw signs of a formidable movement, were too peremptory to be disobeyed, and he would have turned away with great reluctance from a picture so temptingly inviting. Now there was no need to think of this. The great dome of the Milan cathedral showed on the horizon that he was not thirty miles from the Austrian head-quarters, while all around and about him vouched for perfect quiet and tranquillity.

Tempted by a bright moonlight and the delicious freshness of the night, he determined to push on as far as Lecco, where he could halt for the day, and by another night march reach Milan. Descending slowly, they gained the plain before midnight, and now found themselves on that narrow strip of road which, escarped from the rock, tracks the margin of the lake for miles. Here Frank learned from a peasant that Lecco was much too distant to reach before daybreak, and determined to halt at Varenna, only a few miles off.

This man was the only one they had come up with for several hours, and both Frank and Ravitzky remarked the alarm and terror he exhibited as he suddenly found himself in the midst of them.

"Our cloth here," said the cadet, bitterly, "is so allied to thoughts of tyranny and cruelty, one is not to wonder at the terror of that poor peasant."

"He said Varenna was about five miles off," said Frank, who did not like the spirit of the last remark, and wished to change the topic.

"Scarcely so much; but that as the road was newly mended, we should be obliged to walk our cattle."

"Did you remark the fellow while we were talking, how his eye wandered over our party? I could almost swear that I saw him counting our numbers."

"I did not notice that," said the cadet, with an almost sneering tone. "I saw that the poor fellow looked stealthily about from side to side, and seemed most impatient to be off."

"And when he did go," cried Frank, "I could not see what way he took. His 'Felice notte, Signori,' was scarce uttered when he disappeared."

"He took us for a patrol," remarked the other, carelessly; and whether it was this tone, or that Frank was piqued at the assumed coolness of the cadet, he made no further remark, but rode on to the front of the party. Shortly after this the moon disappeared, and as the road occasionally passed through long tunnellings in the rock, the way became totally obscured, so that in places they were obliged to leave the horses entirely to their own guidance.

"There's Varenna at last!" said Frank, pointing out some lights, which, glittering afar off, were reflected in long columns in the water.

"That may still be a couple of miles off," said Ravitzky, "for the shores of the lake wind greatly hereabouts. But, there! did you not see a light yonder?—*that* may be the village." But as he spoke the light was gone, and although they continued to look towards the spot for several minutes, it never reappeared.

"They fish by torchlight here," said Ravitzky, "and that may have been the light; and, by the way, there goes a skiff over the water at a furious rate!—hear how the fellows ply their oars."

The dark object which now skimmed the waters must have been close under the rocks while they were speaking, for she suddenly shot out, and in a few minutes was lost to view.

"Apparently the clink of our sabres has frightened those fellows too," said Frank, laughing, "for they pull like men in haste.

"It's well if it be no worse," said the cadet.

"Partly what I was thinking myself," said Frank. "We may as well be cautious here." And he ordered Ravitzky, with two men, to ride forty paces in advance, while four others, with carbines cocked, were to drop a similar distance to the rear.

The consciousness that he was assuming a responsibility made Frank feel anxious and excited, and at the same time he was not without the irritating sense that attaches to preparations of needless precaution. From this, however, he was rallied by remarking that Ravitzky seemed more grave and watchful than usual, carefully examining the road as he went along, and halting his party at the slightest noise.

"Did you hear or see anything in front?" asked Frank, as he rode up beside them.

"I have just perceived," said the cadet, "that the boat which half an hour ago shot ahead and left us, has now returned, and persists in keeping a little in advance of us. There! you can see her yonder. They make no noise with their oars, but are evidently bent on watching our movements."

"We'll soon see if that be their 'tactic,'" said Frank; and gave the word to his men "To trot."

For about half a mile the little party rode sharply forwards, the very pace and the merry clink of the accoutrements seeming to shake off that suspectful anxiety a slower advance suggests. The men were now ordered to walk their horses, and just as they obeyed the word, Ravitzky called out, "See! there she is again. The winding of the bay has given them the advantage of us, and there they are still in front!"

"After all," rejoined Frank, "it may be mere curiosity. Cavalry, I suppose, are seldom seen in these parts."

"So much the better," said Ravitzky, "for there is no ground for them to manœuvre, with a mountain on one hand and a lake on the other. There! did you see that light? It was a signal of some kind. It was shown twice; and mark, now! it is acknowledged yonder."

"And where is the boat?"

"Gone."

"Let us push on to Varenna; there must be some open ground near the village!" cried Frank. "Trot!"

An older soldier than Frank might have felt some anxiety at the position of a party so utterly defenceless if attacked; perhaps, indeed, his inexperience was not his worst ally at this moment, and he rode on boldly, only eager to know what and where was the peril he was called on to confront. Suddenly Ravitzky halted, and called out: "There's a tree across the road."

Frank rode up, and perceived that a young larch-tree had been placed across the way, half carelessly as it seemed, and without any object of determined opposition.

Two men dismounted by his orders to remove it, and in doing so, discovered that a number of poles and branches were concealed beside the rocks, where they lay evidently ready for use.

"They've had a Tyroler at work here," cried an old Corporal of the Hussars; "they mean to stop us higher up the road, and if we fall back we'll find a barricade here in our rear."

"Over with them into the lake," said Frank, "and then forward at once."

Both orders were speedily obeyed, and the party now advanced at a rapid trot.

They were close to Varenna, and at a spot where the road is closely hemmed in by rocks on either side, when the sharp bang of a rifle was heard, and a shrill cry shouted something from the hill-side, and was answered from the lake. Ravitzky had but time to give the word "Forwards!" when a tremendous fire opened from the vineyards, the roadside, and the boat. The red flashes showed a numerous enemy; but, except these, nothing was to be seen. "Forwards, and reserve your fire, men!" he cried. And they dashed on; but a few paces more found them breasted against a strong barricade of timber and country carts, piled up across the way; a little distance behind which rose another barricade; and here the enemy was thickly posted, as the shattering volley soon proved.

As Frank stood irresolute what course to take, the corporal, who commanded the rear, galloped up to say that all retreat was cut off in that direction, two heavy waggons being thrown across the road, and crowds of people occupying every spot to fire from.

"Dismount, and storm the barricade!" cried Frank; and, setting the example, he sprang from his saddle, and rushed forwards.

There is no peril a Hungarian will not dare if his officer but lead the way; and now, in face of a tremendous fire at pistol-range, they clambered up the steep sides, while the balls were rattling like hail around them.

The Italians, evidently unprepared for this attack, poured in a volley and fled to the cliffs above the road

Advancing to the second barricade, Frank quickly gained the top, and sprang down into the road. Ravitzky, who was ever close behind him, had scarcely gained the height, when, struck in the shoulder by a ball, he dropped heavily down upon the ground. The attack had now begun from front, flanks, and rear together, and a deadly fire poured down upon the hussars without ceasing, while all attempt at defence was hopeless.

"Open a pass through the barricade," shouted Frank, "and bring up the horses!" And while some hastened to obey the order, a few others grouped themselves around Ravitzky, and tried to shelter him as he lay.

"Don't leave me to these fellows, Dalton," cried he, passionately; "heave me over into the lake rather."

Frank now saw that the poor fellow's cheek was torn with a shot, and that his left hand was also shattered.

"The fire is too heavy, Herr Lieutenant; the men cannot open a way for the cattle," whispered the old corporal.

"What's to be done, then?" asked Frank; but the poor corporal fell dead at his side as he spoke. The brunt of the conflict was, however, at the barricades; for, despairing of any prospect of removing the obstacles, many of the hussars had ridden recklessly at them, and there, entangled or falling, were shot down remorselessly by the enemy. One alone forced his way, and, with his uniform bloody and in rags, dashed up to Frank.

"Get the cadet up in front of you," whispered Frank; and Ravitzky, who was now unconscious, was lifted into the saddle; while the hussar, grasping him with his strong arms, held him against his chest.

"Forward, now," said Frank; "on, to the first village, and see him cared for."

"But you, Herr Lieutenant—what's to become of you?"

"I'll not leave my poor wounded comrades."

"There's not a living man amongst them," cried the hussar. "Come along with us, Herr Lieutenant; we may want your help, too."

The firing ceased at this moment; and to the wild shouts and din of conflict there succeeded a dead silence.

"Keep quiet—keep quiet—stand close beneath the rock," whispered Frank; "here comes the boat." And, with slow and measured stroke, the skiff neared the shore, about twenty paces from where they stood.

"Pull in boldly," cried a gruff voice, in Italian; "there's nothing to fear now: neither man nor horse could survive that fire."

"Would that the great struggle could be accomplished so easily!" said a softer tone, which Frank almost fancied he had heard before.

Lanterns were now seen moving in the space between the barricades; and crowds pressed down to examine and pillage the dead.

"Have you found the officer's body?" asked he of the soft voice.

"I suspect the party was under a sergeant's command," said another.

"No, no," rejoined the other; "Giuseppe was positive that he saw an officer."

"See that he has not escaped, then," said the other, eagerly. "The tale of this night's adventure might be told in two ways at Milan."

"The cadet is dying, sir; his head has fallen back," whispered the hussar to Frank.

"The lake, Dalton, the lake!" muttered the dying man, as he threw his arms around Frank's neck. Frank caught him while he was falling, but, overborne by the weight, reeled back against the rock.

"How many are in the boat?" whispered Frank.

"I see but one man, sir," said the hussar.

"Now for it, then," said Frank; "place him between us on a carbine, and make for the boat."

With the energy of a newly-inspired hope, the men obeyed in an instant; and, carrying their wounded comrade, moved stealthily along beneath the shadow of the rock. It was only as they emerged from this, and gained the little gravelly beach, that their figures could be seen.

"Be quiet now, men, and leave that fellow to me," said Frank, as he cocked his pistol. The clank of the sabres, however, seemed warning enough for the crafty Italian, who jumped at once into the lake. With a rush, the Hungarians sprang into the skiff, while Frank, seizing it by the prow, pushed boldly out. The plunge and the splash had, meanwhile, attracted notice, and several hurried down to the beach. Frank had but time to order his men to lie down, when a crashing volley flew over them. "Now, to your oars, boys, before they can load again." The light skiff almost rose out of the water to their vigorous stroke; and although the balls tore incessantly amongst them, they continued to row on. Sheets of bright flame flashed across the water, as volley after volley followed; but the Hungarians were soon out of the reach of the fire, with no other loss than some slight wounds.

At first it seemed as if some pursuit were intended; but this was soon abandoned, and the noise of horses and wheels on the road showed that the multitude were departing landwise. Frank now bethought him what was best to be done. If the country were really in open revolt, the only chance of safety lay in surrendering to something like authority; if this were a mere partial outbreak, in all likelihood the opposite shores of the lake would offer a refuge. A single light, like a star, shone in the far distance, and thither Frank now steered the boat. Ravitzky lay against his knees, his head on Frank's lap, breathing heavily, and occasionally muttering to himself, while the men kept time to the oars with a low, mournful chant, which sounded at least like a death-wail over their comrade.

The lake opposite Varenna is nearly at its widest part; and it was full three hours after the occurrence of the skirmish that they drew near to the light, which they now saw proceeded from a little boat-house belonging to a villa a short distance from shore. A small harbour, with several boats at anchor in it, opened on the water's edge, and a great flight of marble steps led up to a terraced garden, adorned with fountains and groups of statuary.

Frank saw at once that he had invaded the precincts of one of those princely villas which the Milanese nobility possess on the lake, and was uncertain which course to take. His Austrian uniform, he well knew, would prove a sorry recommendation to their kind offices. For some time back the breach between the Austrians and the Lombards had gone on widening, till at length every intercourse had ceased between them; and even the public places resorted to by the one were sure to be avoided on that account by the other. Scarcely a day passed without Milan witnessing some passages of hostility or insolence, and more than one fatal duel showed how far political dislike had descended into personal hatred.

To ask for aid and assistance under circumstances such as these, would have been, as Frank felt, a meanness; to demand it as a right would have been as insolent a pretension; and yet what was to be done? Ravitzky's life was in peril; should he, from any scruple whatever, hazard the chances of saving his poor comrade? "Come what may," thought he, "I'll claim their succour—theirs be the shame if they refuse it!"

The approach was longer than he suspected, and, as he went along, Frank had occasion to remark the tasteful elegance of the grounds, and the costly character of all the embellishments. He saw that he was about to present himself before one of the "magnates" of the land, and half prepared himself for a haughty reception. Crossing a little bridge, he found himself on a grassy plateau, on which a number of windows looked out; and these now all lay open, while seated within were several persons enjoying the Italian luxury of a "bel fresco," as the air of the lake gently stirred the leaves, and carried some faint traces of Alpine freshness into the plains beneath. A large lamp, covered with a deep shade, threw a dubious light through the chamber, and gave to the group all the effect and colouring of a picture.

On an ottoman, supported by pillows, and in an attitude of almost theatrical elegance, lay a lady, dressed in white, a black veil fastened in her hair behind, being half drawn across her face. At her feet sat a young man, with an air of respectful attention; and a little further off, in an easy-chair, reclined the massive proportions of a priest, fanning himself with his skull-cap, and seemingly gasping for air. Behind all, again, was another figure—a tall man, who, with a cigar in his mouth, slowly paced the chamber up and down, stopping occasionally to hear the conversation, but rarely mingling in it.

There was that air of indolent enjoyment and lassitude, that mingled aspect of splendour and neglect, so characteristically Italian in the scene, that Frank forgot himself, as he stood still and gazed on the group, and even listened to the words.

"After all," said the young man, in Italian, "it is better to let them do the thing in their own way! Cutting off a patrol here, shooting a sentry there, stabbing a general to-day, poisoning a field-marshal to-morrow, seems to our notions a very petty war, but it makes a country very untenable in the end!"

"Fuori i barbari! over the Alps with them at any cost!" growled the priest.

"I agree with you," said the tall man, stopping to brush the cinder from his cigar, "if you can drive them away in a stand-up fight; and I don't see why you could not! Numerically, you are about five hundred to one; physically, you look their equals. You have arms in abundance; you know the country; you have the wishes of the people——"

"The prayers of the Church," interposed the lady.

"Beati sunt illi qui moriuntur pro patriâ," muttered the padre.

"You and I, father," said the young man, "would like a little of that beatitude in this world, too."

Frank had now heard more than he had desired to hear; and, unhooking his sabre, he suffered it to clink at his heels as he boldly advanced towards the windows.

"Who have we there?" cried the tall man, advancing to the terrace, and challenging the stranger.

Frank replied, in French, that he was an Austrian officer, whose party had been waylaid near Varenna, and who had made his escape with a wounded comrade and a few others.

"So the shots we heard came from that quarter?" whispered the youth to the lady.

She signed to him to be cautious, and the tall man resumed,—

"This is a private villa, sir; and as yet, at least, neither an Austrian barrack nor an hospital."

"When I tell you, sir," said Frank, with difficulty restraining his passion, "that my comrade is dying, it may, perhaps, excite other feelings than those of national animosity."

"You are a Hungarian?" asked the youth.

"What of that?" broke in the padre. "Tutti barbari! tutti barbari!"

Meanwhile the tall man leaned over where the lady sat, and conversed eagerly with her.

"You have to think how it will look, and how it will tell abroad!" said he, in English. "How shall we persuade the people that we are in their cause, if you make this villa an Austrian refuge?"

She whispered something low in reply, and he rejoined impatiently,—

"These are small considerations; and if we are to be always thinking of humanity, let us give up the game at once."

"You'll not refuse my comrade the consolations of his Church, at least?" said Frank. "I see a reverend father here——"

"And you'll never see him follow you one step out of this chamber," broke in the priest. "Ego autem tanquam surdus, non audiebam," muttered he, with a wave of his hand.

"But if he be a good Catholic," interposed the youth, half slyly.

"Let them be confounded who seek to do me evil!" said the priest, with a solemnity that said how deeply he felt for his own safety.

"This discussion is lasting too long," said Frank, impatiently. "I cannot coerce your humanity, but I can demand as a right that a soldier of your Emperor shall receive shelter and succour."

"I told you so," said the tall man, still addressing the lady in English; "first the entreaty — then the menace."

"And what are we to do?" asked she, anxiously.

"Let them occupy the boat-house; there are beds in the lofts. Jekyl will see that they have whatever is necessary; and perhaps by to-morrow we shall get rid of them." Turning towards the youth, he spoke to him for a few minutes rapidly, and the other replied, "You are right. I'll look to it." He arose as he spoke, and bowing politely to Frank, pronounced himself ready to accompany him.

With a few words of apology for his intrusion, as awkwardly uttered as they were ungraciously received, Frank retired from the chamber, to retrace his steps to the harbour.

Little as he was disposed to be communicative, Albert Jekyl—for it was our old acquaintance—contrived to learn as they went along every circumstance of the late encounter. The pliant Jekyl fully concurred in the indignant epithets of cowards and assassins bestowed by Frank upon his late assailants, deplored with him the miserable and mistaken policy of revolt among the people, and regretted that, as foreigners themselves, they could not offer the hospitality of the villa to the wounded man without exposing their lives and fortunes to an infuriated peasantry.

"What nation do you then belong to?" asked Frank, shrewdly concealing his knowledge of English.

"We are—so to say—of different countries," said Jekyl, smiling, and evading the question. "The padre is a Florentine——"

"And the lady?"

"She is a very charming person, and if it were not that she is a little over-devout—a shade too good—would be the most delightful creature in existence."

"The tall man is her husband, I conclude."

"No—not her husband," smiled Jekyl again; "a person you'll like much when you see more of him. Short and abrupt, perhaps, at first, but so kind-hearted, and so generous."

"And has the villa got a name?" asked Frank, in a voice of some impatience at finding how little his companion repaid his frankness.

"It is called La Rocca," said Jekyl. "Had you not been a stranger in Italy, you would scarcely have asked. It is the most celebrated on the whole lake."

Frank thought he had heard the name before, but when, where, or how, he could not remember. Other cares were, besides, too pressing upon him to make him dwell on the subject, and he willingly addressed himself to the more urgent duties of the moment.

The boat-house stood in no need of all Jekyl's apologies. Frank had lodged in many inferior quarters since he had begun soldiering; there were several excellent bedrooms, and a delightful little *salon*, which looked directly out upon the lake. Ravitzky, too, had rallied considerably, and his wounds, although formidable from the loss of blood, showed nothing likely to prove fatal. Jekyl pledged himself to send a surgeon at once to him; and, adding all kinds of civil speeches and offers of personal services, at last left the friends together to exchange confidences.

"What are our hosts like, Dalton?" said the cadet.

"*You* would call them most patriotic, Ravitzky, for they would scarcely give us shelter. Their only regret seemed that our friends yonder had not done the work better, and finished off the rest of us!"

"It is not pleasant to accept of an ungracious hospitality; but I suppose that I, at least, shall not trouble them long. There's something hot goes on ebbing here that tells of internal bleeding, and if so, a few hours ought to suffice."

Frank did his best to rally his poor comrade; but the task is a difficult one with those whose fear of death is small.

"You'll have to write to Milan, Dalton," said he, suddenly.

"I should rather say, to hasten thither at once," said Frank. "I ought to report myself as soon as possible."

"But you mustn't leave me, Dalton; I cannot part with you. A few hours is not much to you, to me it is a life long. I want you also to write to Walstein for me; he'll take care to tell my mother."

Frank knew well the breach of discipline this compliance would entail, and that he could scarcely be guilty of a graver offence against duty; but Ravitzky clung to his wish with such pertinacity, throwing into the entreaty all the eagerness of a last request, that Frank was obliged to promise he would remain, and let the result take what shape it might. While he, therefore, gave orders to his only unwounded comrade to hold himself in readiness to set out for Milan by daybreak, he proceeded to write the brief despatch which was to record his disaster. There are few sadder passages in the life of a young soldier than that in which he has to convey tidings of his own defeat. Want of success is so linked and bound up with want of merit, that every line, every word, seems a self-accusation.

However inevitable a mishap might appear to any witnessing it, a mere reader of the account might suggest fifty expedients to escape it. He knew, besides, the soldierlike contempt entertained in the service for all attacks of undisciplined forces, and how no party, however small, of "regulars" was esteemed insufficient to cope with a mob of peasants or villagers. Any contradiction to so acknowledged a theory would be received with loud reprobation, and, whatever came of it, the most inevitable result would be the professional ruin of him unlucky enough to incur such a failure.

"There's an end of the career of the Lieutenant von Dalton," said Frank, as he concluded the paper. "Neither his uncle, the field-marshal, nor his sister, the princess, will have favour enough to cover delinquency like this." It did, indeed, seem a most humiliating avowal, and probably his own depressed state gave even a sadder colouring to the narrative. He accompanied this despatch by a few lines to the count, his grand-uncle, which, if apologetic, were manly and straightforward; and, while bearing a high testimony to Ravitzky's conduct, took all the blame of failure to himself alone.

He would gladly have lain down to rest when this last was completed, but the cadet pressed eagerly for his services, and the letter to Walstein must be written at once.

"The surgeon tells me that there is internal bleeding," said he, "and that, should it return with any degree of violence, all chance of recovery is hopeless. Let us look the danger boldly in the face then, Dalton, and, while I have the time, let me tell Walstein all that I have learned since we parted. The letter I will confide to your safe keeping till such time as it can be forwarded without risk of discovery."

"Is there necessity for such precaution?" asked Frank.

"Can you ask me the question?"

"Then how am I to write it?" said he.

"Simply from my dictation," replied the other, calmly. "The sentiments will not be yours, but mine. The mere act of the pen, for which these fingers are too weak, can never wound the susceptibility of even *your* loyalty. You are not satisfied with this?"

Frank shook his head dubiously.

"Then leave me where I am. I ask no companionship, nor friendship either—or, if you prefer it, hasten to Milan and denounce me as a traitor. My character is well enough known not to need corroboration to your charge; the allegation will never hurt *me*, and it may serve *you*. Ay, Herr Lieutenant, it will prove an opportune escape for the disgrace of this unlucky night. They will forgive you much for such a disclosure."

Frank's temper would have been insufficient to bear such an insult as this, had not the words been spoken by one already excited to the madness of fever, and whose eye now flashed with the wild glare of mania.

It was long before Frank could calm down the passionate excitement of the sick man, and fit him for the task he wished to execute; and even then Ravitzky undertook it in a sullen, resentful spirit, that seemed to say that nothing short of the necessity would have reduced him to such a confidence. Nor was this all. Pain, and nervous irritability together, made him difficult, and occasionally impossible, to understand. The names of people and places of Hungarian origin Frank in vain endeavoured to spell; the very utmost he could do being to follow the rapid utterance with which the other at times spoke, and impart something like consistency to his wild, unconnected story.

That Ravitzky had been employed in secret communications with some of the Hungarian leaders was plain enough, and that he had held intercourse with many not yet decided how to act, was also apparent. The tangled web of intrigue was, however, too intricate for faculties labouring as his were, and what between his own wanderings and Frank's misconceptions, the document became as mysterious as an oracle. Perhaps Frank was not sorry for this obscurity; or perhaps, like the lady who consoled herself for the indiscretion of keeping a lover's picture by the assurance that "it was not like him," he felt an equal satisfaction in thinking that the subject of his manuscript could never throw any light upon any scheme that ever existed.. Now, it ran on about the feelings of the Banat population, and their readiness to take up arms; now, it discussed the fordage of rivers in Transylvania. Here, was an account of the arms in the arsenal of Arad; there, a suggestion how to cut off Nugent's corps on the Platen See. At times it seemed as if a great Sclave revolt were in contemplation; at others, the cause appeared that of the Hungarian nobles alone, anxious to regain all the privileges of the old feudalism. "At all events it is rebellion," thought Frank; and heartily glad was he when the task was completed, and everything save the address appended. It was now sealed, and by Ravitzky's advice deposited within the linings of Frank's pelisse, till such time as a safe opportunity might offer of forwarding it to Walstein.

The task occupied some hours; and when it was completed, so tired was Frank by former exertion and excitement, that he lay down on the floor, and with his head on the sick man's bed, fell fast asleep. Such had been his eagerness to finish this lengthy document, that he had never perceived that he was watched as he wrote, and that from the little copse beside the window a man had keenly observed him for several hours long.

Ravitzky, too, fell into a heavy slumber; and now, as both slept, a noiseless foot crossed the floor, and a man in the dark dress of a priest drew nigh the bedside. Waiting for some seconds as if to assure himself of the soundness of their sleep, he bent down and examined their features. Of the cadet he took little notice; but when his eyes fell upon Frank's face, pale and exhausted as he lay, he almost started back with astonishment, and for several minutes he seemed as if trying to disabuse himself of an illusion. Even the uniform appeared to surprise him, for he examined its details with the greatest care. As he stood thus, with the pelisse in his hand, he seemed suddenly to remember the letter he had seen placed within the lining; and then as suddenly drawing out his penknife, he made a small aperture in the seam, and withdrew the paper. He was about to replace the pelisse upon the bed, when, by a second thought as it were, he tore off the envelope of the letter, and reinserted it within the lining.

A single glance at it appeared to convey the whole tenor of its contents, and his dark eyes ran over the words with eager haste; then, turning away, he moved cautiously from the room. Once in the free air again, he reopened the paper, his sallow features seeming to light up with a kind of passionate lustre as he traced the lines. "It is not—it cannot be without a meaning, that we are thus for ever meeting in life!" cried he; "these are the secrets by which destiny works its purpose, and we blindly call them accident! Even the savage knows better, and deems him an enemy who crosses his path too frequently. Ay, and it will come to this one day," muttered he, slowly; "he or I—he or I." Repeating this over and over, he slowly returned to the villa.

CHAPTER XV.

A VILLA AND ITS COMPANY.

Having told our readers that the villa was called La Rocca, it is perhaps needless that we should say that the lady was our old friend Lady Hester, who, under the spiritual guidance of the Canon of the Duomo, was now completing her religious education, while Lord Norwood was fain to escape the importunity of duns and the impertinence of creditors by a few weeks' retirement in this secluded region. Not that this was his only inducement. For some time back he had pressed his claim on various members of his Government for place or employment. He had in vain represented the indignity of a peer reduced to beggary, or the scarcely better alternative of play for support. He had tried—unsuccessfully, however—every sort of cajolery, menace, and flattery, to obtain something; and after successively offering his services for or against Carlism in Spain, with Russia or against her in the Caucasus, with twenty minor schemes in Mexico, Sicily, Greece, and Cuba, he at last determined on making Northern Italy the sphere of his abilities, wisely calculating that before the game was played out he should see enough to know what would be the winning side.

An accidental meeting with D'Esmonde, which renewed this old intimacy, had decided him on taking this step. The abbé had told him that the English Government of the day was secretly favourable to the movement; and although, from the necessities of state policy and the requirements of treaties, unable to afford any open or avowed assistance, would still gladly recognize his participation in the struggle, and, in the event of success, liberally reward him. "A new kingdom of Upper Italy, with Milan for the capital, and Viscount Norwood the resident minister plenipotentiary," there was the whole episode, in three volumes, with its "plot," "catastrophe," and "virtue rewarded," in appropriate fashion; and as times were bad, neither racing nor cards profitable, patriotism was the only unexplored resource he could think of.

Not that my lord had much faith in the abbé. Far from it. He thought all priests were knaves; but he also thought "that he'll not cheat *me*. No, no; too wide awake for that. He'll not try that dodge. Knows where I've graduated. Remembers too well what school I come of." He was perfectly candid, too, in this mode of reasoning, calmly telling D'Esmonde his opinions of himself, and frankly showing that any attempt at a "jockey" of him must inevitably fail. The abbé, to do him justice, took all this candour well—affected to deem it the mere ebullition of honest John Bullism; and so, they were well met. At times, indeed, the priest's enthusiasm carried him a little away, and he ventured to speculate on the glorious career that conversion would open to the noble viscount, and the splendid fruits such a change would be certain to produce, Norwood was, however, too practical for such remote benefits; and, if the abbé couldn't "make the thing safe," as he styled it, would not listen to this suggestion. A rich Italian princess—there were two or three such prizes in the wheel—or an infanta of Spain, might solace many a theological doubt; but Norwood said there was no use in quoting the "fathers" when he was thinking only of the "daughters."

And the priest wisely seemed to take him at his word. As for Lady Hester, political intrigue was quite new to her, and consequently very delightful. Since the cardinal's departure for Rome she had begun to weary somehow of the ordinances of her new faith. The canonico but ill replaced his Eminence. He had none of that velvety smoothness of manner, that soft and gentle persuasiveness of the dignitary. He could neither smile away a doubt nor resolve a difficulty by a "bon mot." It is but fair to say that he was no ascetic, that he loved good cheer and pleasant converse, and was free to let others participate in the enjoyment. Lady Hester was, however, too much habituated to such indulgences to reckon them other than necessaries. D'Esmonde, if he had had time, might have compensated for all these deficiencies, but he was far too deeply engaged with other cares, and his air of grave preoccupation was more suited to awe her ladyship than suggest ease in his presence. And now we come to Albert Jekyl—the last member of this incongruous family. Nothing was less to his taste than any fanaticism, whether it took the form of religion or politics. All such extravagances were sure to interfere with society, impede intercourse, and disturb that delightful calm of existence wherein vices ripen, and where men of his stamp gather the harvest.

To overthrow a Government, to disturb the settled foundations of a State, were, to his thinking, a species of *inconvenance* that savoured of intense vulgarity; and he classified such anarchists with men who would like to smash the lamps, tear down the hangings, and destroy the decorations of a *salon* in which they were asked to pass the evening, preferring to sit down amid ruin and wreck rather than eat their supper at a well-ordered and well-furnished board.

To Jekyl's eyes it was a very nice world as it was, if people would only let it alone! "A world of bright eyes, and soft tresses, and white shoulders, with Donizetti's music and Moët's champagne, was not to be despised after all." He had no sympathies, therefore, with these disturbers; but he was too well bred ever to oppose himself to the wishes of the company, and so he seemed to concur with what he could not prevent. He could have wished that the Italians would take a lesson from the Swiss, who only revolt when there is nothing else to do, and never take to cutting each other's throats during the season when there are travellers to be cheated; "but, perhaps," said he, "they will soon get enough of it, and learn that their genius lies more in ballets and bonbons than in bombs and rockets."

Of such various hopes and feelings were the party made up who now awaited D'Esmonde's presence at the supper-table. It was past midnight, and they had been expecting him with impatience for above an hour back. Twice had the canonico fallen asleep, and started up with terror at what he called a "fantasma di fame." Jekyl had eaten sardines and oysters till he was actually starving. Lady Hester was fidgety and fretful, as waiting always made her; while Norwood walked from the room to the terrace, and out upon the grass to listen, uneasy lest any mischance should have befallen one who was so deeply involved in their confidences.

"It is but three or four-and-twenty miles to Milan," muttered Norwood; "he might easily have been here by this."

"The road is infested with banditti," growled out the padre.

"Banditti!" said Norwood, contemptuously. But whether the sneer was intended for the cut-throats' courage, or the folly of men who would expect any booty from a priest, is hard to say; clearly the padre took it in the latter sense, for he rejoined,—

"Even so, milordo. When I was curé of Bergamo they stopped me one night on the Lecco road. A bishop was on a visit with me, and I had gone up to Milan to procure some fish for our Friday's dinner. Oimè! what a turbot it was, and how deliciously it looked at the bottom of the calessino, with the lobsters keeping guard at either side of it, and a small basket of Genoa oysters—those rock beauties that melt in the mouth like a ripe strawberry! There they were, and I had fallen asleep, and was dreaming pleasantly. I thought I saw St. Cecilia dressing 'filets de sole aux fines herbes,' and that she was asking me for sweet marjoram, when suddenly I felt a sharp stick as it were in my side, and starting up, I felt the point—the very point—of a thin stiletto between my ribs.

"'Scusi, padre mio,' said a whining voice, and a great black-bearded rascal touched his cap to me with one hand, while with the other he held the dagger close to my side, a comrade all the time covering me with a blunderbuss on the opposite side of the cart—'scusi, padre mio, but we want your purse!' 'Maladetto sia——' 'Don't curse,' said he, beggingly—'don't curse, padre, we shall only have to spend more money in masses; but be quick, out with the "quattrini."'

"'I have nothing but the Church fund for the poor,' said I, angrily.

"'We are the poor, holy father,' whined the rogue.

"'I mean the poor who hate to do evil,' said I.

"'It grieves us to the soul when we are driven to it!' sighed the scoundrel; and he gave me a gentle touch with the point of the stiletto. Dark as it was, I could see the wretch grin as I screamed out.

"'Be quick,' growled out the other, roughly, as he brought the wide mouth of the trombone close to my face. There was no help for it. I had to give up my little leathern pouch with all my quarter's gatherings. Many a warning did I give the villains of the ill-luck that followed sacrilege—how palsies, and blindness, and lameness came upon the limbs of those who robbed the Church. They went on counting the coins without so much as minding me! At last, when they had fairly divided the booty, the first fellow said, 'One favour more, holy father, before we part!'

"Would you take my coat or my cassock?' said I, indignantly.

"'Heaven forbid it!' said he, piously; 'we want only your blessing, padre mio!'

"'My blessing on thieves and robbers!'

"'Who need it more, holy father?' said he, with another stick of the point—'who need it more?'

"I screamed aloud, and the wretches this time laughed outright at my misery; meanwhile, they both uncovered and knelt down in the road before me. Oimè! oimè! There was no help for it. I had to descend from the calessino!"

"And did you bless them, father?" asked Jekyl.

"That did I! for when I tried in the middle of the benediction to slip in a muttering of 'Confundite ipsos qui quærunt animam meam,' the whining rogue popped out his accursed weapon, and cried, 'Take care, holy father! We only bargain for the blessing.'"

"They left you the fish, however?" said Norwood.

"Not an oyster!" sighed the priest. "'You would not have us eat flesh on the fast, padre mio!' said the hypocritical knave. 'Poor fellows like us have no dispensation, nor the money to buy it!' And so they packed up everything, and then, helping me to my seat, wished me a pleasant journey, and departed."

"I am curious to know if you really forgave them, padre?" said Jekyl, with an air of serious inquiry.

"Have I not said so!" rejoined the priest, testily.

"Why, you tried to insinuate something that surely was not a blessing, father."

"And if I did, the fellow detected it. Ah, that rogue must have served mass once on a time, or his ears had never been so sharp!"

"Are yours quick enough to say if that be the tramp of a horse?" asked Norwood, as he listened to the sounds.

"Yes, that is a horse," cried Jekyl.

"Now, then, for the soup," exclaimed the canon. "Ah! yes," added he, with a sigh, as he turned to Lady Hester, "these are the crosses—these are the trials of life: but they are good for us—they are good for us! Poor mortals that we are! Non est sanitas in carne meâ. Oimè!

oimè!" And so moralizing, he gave her his arm as he re-entered the house. In less than a minute later, D'Esmonde galloped up to the door, and dismounted.

"Has anything occurred?—you are late to-night," asked Norwood, hastily.

"Nothing. The city, however, was in great alarm, and the tocsin was twice sounded in the churches when I left at ten o'clock; the guards were doubled at the gates, and mounted patrols making the rounds in every quarter."

"What was this for?" asked Norwood.

"A mere false alarm—nothing more. The Austrians are harassed beyond measure by these frequent calls to arms; and men grumble that they are mustered twice or thrice during the night without any cause. A petard exploded in the street, or a church bell rung, is sure to call out the whole garrison."

"I begin to suspect that our Italian friends will be satisfied with this, and never go further," said Norwood, contemptuously.

"You are wrong there. It is by the frequency and impunity of these demonstrations, that they are working up courage for an overt movement. By the time that the Austrians have grown indifferent to such nightly disturbances, the others will have gained hardihood for a real outbreak."

"If they only be persuaded that war is assassination on a grand scale, they might make excellent soldiers," simpered Jekyl; but the others seemed to take no heed of his pleasantry.

"Have they not fixed a time?" asked Norwood, eagerly, "or is it all left vague and uncertain as ever?"

"The Swiss are quite ready. We only wait now for the Piedmontese; Genoa is with us at a word; so are Leghorn and the towns of the Romagna. The signal once given, there will be such a rising as Italy has not seen for centuries. England will supply arms, ammunition——"

"All but men," sighed Norwood; "and it is exactly what are wanting."

"And France——"

"Will give her sympathies," broke in Jekyl. "That dear France! that always says God speed to disturbance and trouble wherever it be."

"What of that Austrian soldier?" said D'Esmonde, who did not quite like the tone of either of his companions—"is he better?"

"The surgeon says that he cannot recover," replied Jekyl; "and for that reason I suspect that he's in no danger."

"Have you seen the officer to-day?" asked the priest again.

"No," replied Norwood. "Jekyl and I twice endeavoured to speak with him; but he slept half the forenoon, and since that he has been writing innumerable despatches to head-quarters."

"They say at Milan that he'll be shot for this misadventure," said D'Esmonde; "that he acted in contravention to his orders, or did something, I know not what, which will be treated as a grave military offence."

"The canonico is furious with us for this delay," said Jekyl, laughing, as he returned from a peep into the *salon.* The abbé was, meanwhile, deep in a whispered conversation with Norwood. "Ay," said the latter, doubtingly, "but it's a serious thing to tamper with a soldier's fidelity. The Austrians are not the people to suffer this with impunity."

"How are they to know it?"

"If it fail—if this young fellow reject our offers, which, as a Hungarian, it is just as likely that he will do?"

"But he is not a Hungarian. I know him, and all about him."

"And can you answer for his readiness to join us?"

"I cannot go that far; but seeing the position he stands in, what can be more probable? And, take the worst case: suppose that he refuses, I have him still!"

"How do you mean?"

"Simply that I have in my hands the means to destroy all his credit, and peril his very life!" The sudden energy of passion in which he delivered these words appeared to have escaped him unawares, for as quickly recovering his wonted smoothness of tone, he said, "Not that anything short of the last necessity would drive me to such an alternative."

"May I never have to trust to your tender mercies, abbé!" said Norwood, with a laugh, in which there was far more of earnest than of jesting; "but let us talk of these things after supper." And with the careless ease of a mere idler, he lounged into the house, followed by the others.

Once seated at supper, the conversation took a general turn, requiring all the abbé's skill and Jekyl's tact at times to cover from the servants who waited the secret meaning of many of those allusions to politics and party which Lady Hester uttered, in the perfect conviction that she was talking in riddles. Her indiscretion rendered her, indeed, a most perilous associate; and in spite of hints, warnings, and signs, she would rattle on upon the dangerous theme of revolt and insurrection; the poor devices of deception she employed being but sorry blinds to the native quickness of Italian shrewdness.

This little fire of cross-purposes sadly perplexed the canonico, who looked up now and then from his plate with a face of stupid astonishment at all that went forward.

"You have heard, I suppose, canon," said the abbé, adroitly addressing him, "that the city authorities have only granted twelve thousand crowns for the festival of San Giovanni?"

"Twelve thousand crowns! It will not pay for the throne of the Virgin," growled out the canon, "not to speak of the twenty-six angels in sprigged muslin!"

"There are to be no angels this time. The priests of the Santa Croce are to walk behind the canopy."

"It will ruin the procession," muttered the canon.

"They certainly look as little like angels as need be," interposed Jekyl, slyly.

"Sixty lamps and two hundred tapers are a scant allowance," continued D'Esmonde.

"Darkness—positive darkness!" ejaculated the canon; "ubi evasit pietas nostra?—what has become of our ancient faith?"

"The soldier, your reverence, wishes to see you immediately," said a servant, entering in haste; "he fears that he is sinking fast."

"The heavy dews of the morning are falling—can he not wait till the sun rises, Giuseppe?"

"You had better see him at once, canon," whispered the abbé.

"Oimè! oimè!" sighed the priest, "mine is a weary road—'potum meum cum fletu miscebam,'" added he, finishing off his champagne, "is it far from this?"

"Only to the boat-house, father," said Lady Hester.

"Per mares et ignos! it's a good half-hour's walk," growled he.

"You can have the pony carriage, father," interposed she.

"He starts at everything by night—don't trust the pony," said Jekyl.

"Well, then, be carried in my chair, father."

"Be it so—be it so," muttered he. "I yield myself to anything—'sicut passer sub tecto'—I have no will of my own."

"Go along with him, my lord," whispered D'Esmonde: "the opportunity will be a good one to see the young officer. While the father talks with the sick man, you can converse with the friend. See in what frame of mind he is."

"Does he speak French? for I am but an indifferent German," said Norwood.

"Yes, French will do," said D'Esmonde, who, after a moment's hesitation as to whether he should reveal the secret of Frank's country, seemed to decide on still reserving the knowledge."

"But this could be better done to-morrow," said Norwood.

"To-morrow will be too late," whispered D'Esmonde. "Go now; you shall know my reasons at your return."

Norwood took little heed of the canonico's attempts at conversation as they went along. His mind was occupied with other thoughts. The moment of open revolt was drawing nigh, and now came doubts of D'Esmonde's sincerity and good faith. It was true, that many of the priests were disposed to the wildest theories of democracy—they were men of more than ordinary capacity, with far less than the ordinary share of worldly advantages.

D'Esmonde, however, was not one of these; there was no limit to which his ambition might not reasonably aspire—no dignity in his Church above his legitimate hopes. What benefit could accrue to him from a great political convulsion? "He'll not be nearer to the Popedom when the cannon are shaking the Vatican!" Such were the puzzling considerations that worked within him as he drew near the boat-house.

A figure was seated on the door-sill, with the head buried beneath his hands, but on hearing the approach of the others he quickly arose and drew himself up. "You are too late, sir," said he, addressing the priest, sternly; "my poor comrade is no more!"

"Ah me! and they would drag me out in the chill night air," groaned the canonico.

The cruelty of that must have weighed heavily on his heart.

Frank turned away, and re-entered the house without speaking, while Norwood followed him in silence. On a low truckle bed lay the dead soldier, his manly face calm and tranquil as the cold heart within his breast. A weatherbeaten, bronzed soldier sat at the foot of the bed, the tears slowly flowing along his cheeks, as his bloodshot eyes were fixed upon his comrade. It was the first blood that had been shed in the cause of Italian independence, and Norwood stood thoughtfully staring at the victim.

"Poor fellow!" said he; "they who gave his death-wound little knew what sympathy for liberty that jacket covered, nor how truly the Hun is the brother of the Italian."

"They were assassins and murderers;" cried Frank, passionately; "fellows who attacked us from behind walls and barricades."

"Your reproach only means that they were not soldiers."

"That they were cowards, rather—rank cowards. The liberty that such fellows strive for will be well worthy of them! But no more of this," cried he, impatiently; "is there a church near, where I can lay his body—he was a Catholic?"

"There is a chapel attached to the villa; I will ask permission for what you require."

"You will confer a favour on me," said Frank, "for I am desirous of hastening on to Milan at once."

"You will scarcely find your comrades there," said Norwood.

Frank started with surprise, and the other went on,—

"There are rumours of a serious revolt in the city, and some say that the Imperial troops have retired on the Mantua road."

"They know nothing of Austrian soldiers who say these things," said Frank, haughtily; "but there is the more need that I should lose no time here."

"Come, then, I will show you the way to the chapel," said Norwood, who could not divest himself of a feeling of interest for the young soldier.

Frank spoke a few words in Hungarian to his men, and hastily wrapping the dead man in his cloak, they placed him on a door, his chako and his sword at either side of him.

"You will see that he is buried as becomes a brave and a true soldier," said Frank, with a faltering accent, as they went along. "This will defray the cost."

"No, no; there is no need of that," said Norwood, pushing away the proffered purse. "We'll look to it ourselves."

"Let there be some record of him preserved, too, for his friends' sake. His name was 'Stanislas Ravitsky.'"

"And may I ask yours?" said Norwood.

"You'll hear of it in the first court-martial return for Milan," said Frank, bitterly.

"Then why go there?—why hasten to certain ruin?"

"You would say, why not desert?—why not forfeit my honour and my oath? Because I am a gentleman, sir; and if the explanation be not intelligible, so much the worse for you."

"I have left him in the chapel," said Norwood to D'Esmonde, a few minutes after this conversation; "he is kneeling beside the corpse, and praying. There is nothing to be done with him. It is but time lost to attempt it."

"So much the worse for *him*," said D'Esmonde, significantly repeating the words that Norwood related, while he hastily left the spot and walked towards the high road, where now an Austrian picket was standing beside the horses.

"This is your warrant, sir," said D'Esmonde to the officer, handing him a paper; "you'll find the person you seek for in the chapel yonder."

The officer saluted in reply, and ordered his men to mount, while D'Esmonde, passing into a thick part of the copse, was out of sight in a moment.

CHAPTER XVI.

PETER DALTON ON POLITICS, LAW, AND SOCIALITIES.

We have seen Baden in the "dark winter of its discontent"—in the spring-time of its promise—and now we come back to it once more, in the full blaze of its noonday splendour. It was the height of the season! And what a world of dissipation does that phrase embody! What reckless extravagance—what thoughtless profusion—what systematic vice glossed over by the lacquer of polished breeding—what beauty which lacks but innocence to be almost divine! All the attractions of a lovely country, all the blandishments of wealth, the aids of music and painting, the odour of flowers, the songs of birds—all pressed into the service of voluptuous dissipation, and made to throw a false lustre over a scene where vice alone predominates.

It was the camp of pleasure, to which all rallied who loved to fight beneath that banner. And there they were, a mingled host of princes, ministers, and generals. The spoiled children of fashion, the reckless adventurer, the bankrupt speculator, the flattered beauty in all the pride of her loveliness, the tarnished virtue in all the effrontery of conquest! Strange and incongruous elements of good and evil—of all that is honoured in heroism, and all that men shrink from with shame—there they were met as equals.

As if by some conventional relaxation of all the habits which rule society, men admitted to their intimacy here those they would have strenuously avoided elsewhere. Vice, like poverty, seemed to have annihilated all the distinctions of rank, and the "decorated" noble and the branded felon sat down to the same board like brethren.

Amid all the gay company of the Cursaal none appeared to have a greater relish for the glittering pleasures of the scene than a large elderly man, who, in a coat of jockey cut and a showy waistcoat, sat at the end of one of the tables—a post which the obsequious attention of the waiters proclaimed to be his own distinctively. Within a kind of ring-fence of bottles and decanters of every shape and size, he looked the genius of hospitality and dissipation; and it was only necessary to mark how many a smile was turned on him, how many a soft glance was directed towards him, to see that he was the centre of all designing flattery. There was a reckless, unsuspecting jollity in his look that could not be mistaken; and his loud, hearty laugh bespoke the easy self-satisfaction of his nature. Like "special envoys," *his* champagne bottles were sent hither and thither down the table, and at each instant a friendly nod or a courteous bow acknowledged his hospitable attention. At either side of him were seated a knot of his peculiar parasites, and neither was wit nor beauty wanting to make their society agreeable. There is a species of mock affection, a false air of attachment in the homage rendered to such a man as this, that makes the flattery infinitely more seductive than all the respectful devotion that ever surrounded a monarch. And so our old friend Peter Dalton—need we to name him?—felt it. "Barring the glorious burst of a fox-hunting chorus, or the wild 'hip, hip' of a favourite toast, it was almost as good as Ireland." Indeed, in some respects, it had rather the advantage over the dear island.

Peter was intensely Irish, and had all the native relish for high company, and it was no mean enjoyment that he felt in seeing royal and serene highnesses at every side of him, and knowing that some of the great names of Europe were waiting for the very dish that was served first in honour to himself. There was a glittering splendour, too, in the gorgeously decorated "saal," with its frescoes, its mirrors, its lustres, and its bouquets, that captivated him. The very associations which a more refined critic would have cavilled at had their attractions for *him*, and he gloried in the noise and uproar. The clink of glasses and the crash of plates were to his ears the pleasant harmony of a convivial meeting.

He was in the very height of enjoyment. A few days back he had received a large remittance from Kate. It came in a letter to Nelly, which he had not read, nor cared to read. He only knew that she was at St. Petersburg waiting for Midchekoff's arrival. The money had driven all other thoughts out of his head, and before Nelly had glanced her eye over half the first page, he was already away to negotiate the bills with Abel Kraus, the money-changer. As for Frank, they had not heard of him for several months back. Nelly, indeed, had received a few lines from Count Stephen, but they did not appear to contain anything very interesting, for she went to her room soon after reading them, and Dalton forgot to ask more on the subject. His was not a mind to conjure up possible misfortunes. Always too ready to believe the best, he took the world ever on its sunniest side, and never would acknowledge a calamity while there was a loophole of escape from it.

"Why wouldn't she be happy?—What the devil could ail her?—Why oughtn't he to be well?—Wasn't he as strong as a bull, and not twenty yet!" Such were the consolations of his philosophy, and he needed no better.

His flatterers, too, used to insinuate little fragments of news about the "Princess" and the "young Count," as they styled Frank, which he eagerly devoured, and as well as his memory served him, tried to repeat to Nelly when he returned home of a night. These were enough for him; and the little sigh with which he tossed off his champagne to their health was the extent of sorrow the separation cost him.

Now and then, it is true, he wished they were with him;

he'd have liked to show the foreigners "what an Irish girl was;" he would have been pleased, too, that his handsome boy should have been seen amongst "them grinning baboons, with hair all over them." He desired this the more, that Nelly would never venture into public with him, or, if she did, it was with such evident shame and repugnance, that even his selfishness could not exact the sacrifice. "'Tis, maybe, the sight of the dancing grieves her, and she lame," was the explanation he gave himself of this strange turn of mind; and whenever honest Peter had hit upon what he thought was a reason for anything, he dismissed all further thought about the matter for ever. It was a debt paid, and he felt as if he had the receipt on his file.

On the day we now speak of he was supremely happy. An Irish peer had come into the Saal leaning on his arm, and twice called him "Dalton" across the table. The waiter had apologized to a royal highness for not having better Johannisberg, as the "Schloss" wine had all been reserved for the "Count," as Peter was styled. He had won four hundred Napoleons at roulette before dinner; and a bracelet, that cost a hundred and twenty, was glittering on a fair wrist beside him, while a murmur of his name, in tones of unquestionable adulation, from all parts of the table, seemed to fill up the measure of his delight.

"What's them places vacant there?" called he out to the waiter, and pointing to five chairs turned back to the table in token of being reserved.

"It was an English family had arrived that morning who bespoke them."

"Faix! then, they're likely to lose soup and fish," said Peter; "the 'coorses' here wait for no man." And as he spoke the party made their appearance.

A large elderly lady of imposing mien and stately presence led the way, followed by a younger and slighter figure; after whom walked a very feeble old man, of a spare and stooping form; the end being brought up by a little rosy man, with a twinkling eye and a short jerking limp, that made him seem rather to dance than walk forward.

"They've ca-ca-carried off the soup already," cried the last-mentioned personage, as he arranged his napkin before him, "and—and—and, I fa-fancy, the fish, too."

"Be quiet, Scroope," called out the fat lady; "do be quiet."

"Yes, but we shall have to p-p-pay all the same," cried Scroope.

"There's good sense in that, any way," broke in Dalton; "will you take a glass of champagne with me, sir? You'll find it cool, and not bad of its kind."

Mr. Purvis acknowledged the courtesy gracefully, and bowed as he drank.

"Take the ortolans to that lady, Fritz," said Dalton to the waiter; and Mrs. Ricketts smiled her sweetest gratitude.

"We are dreadfully late," sighed she; "but the dear Princess of Stauffenschwillingen passed all the morning with us, and we couldn't get away."

"I thought it was the woman about the ro-rope dancing detained you."

"Hush, Scroope—will you be quiet? Martha, dearest, don't venture on those truffles. My poor child, they would be the death of you." And, so saying, she drew her companion's plate before herself. "A most agreeable, gentlemanlike person," muttered she, in a whisper, evidently intended for Peter's ears. "We must find out who he is. I suppose you know the princess, sir? Don't you love her?" said she, addressing Dalton.

"Faix! if you mean the old lady covered with snuff that comes here to have her dogs washed at the well, without intending any offence to you, I do not. To tell you the truth, ma'am, when I was in the habit of fallin' in love, it was a very different kind of creature that did it! Ay, ay, 'The days is gone when beauty bright my heart's ease spoilt.'"

"'My heart's chain wove,'" smiled and whispered Mrs. Ricketts.

"Just so. It comes to the same thing. Give me the wine, Fritz. Will you drink a glass of wine with me, sir?"

The invitation was addressed to General Ricketts, who, by dint of several shoves, pokings, and admonitions, was at last made aware of the proposition.

"Your father's getting a little the worse for wear, miss," said Dalton to Martha, who blushed at even the small flattery of the observation.

"The general's services have impaired his constitution," remarked Mrs. Ricketts, proudly.

"Ay, and to all appearance it was nothing to boast of in the beginning," replied Peter, as he surveyed with self-satisfaction his own portly form.

"Fourteen years in the Hima-Hima-Hima——"

"Himalaya, Scroope,—the Himalaya."

"The highest mountains in the world!" continued Purvis.

"For wet under foot, and a spongy soil that never dries, I'll back the Galtees against them any day. See, now, you can walk from morning to night, and be over your head at every step you go."

"Where are they?" inquired Scroope.

"Why, where would they be? In Ireland, to be sure; and here's prosperity to her, and bad luck to Process-servers, 'Polis,' and Poor-Law Commissioners!" Dalton drained his glass with solemn energy to his toast, and looked as though his heart was relieved of a weight by this outburst of indignation.

"You Irish are so patriotic!" exclaimed Mrs. Ricketts, enthusiastically.

"I believe we are," replied Dalton. "'Tis only we've an odd way of showing it."

"I remark that they ne-never live in Ireland when they can li-live out of it," cackled Purvis.

"Well, and why not? Is it by staying at home in the one place people learns improvements? You might drink whisky-punch for forty years and never know the taste of champagne. Potatoes wouldn't teach you the flavour of truffles. There's nothing like travellin'!"

"Very true," sighed Mrs. Ricketts; "but, as the poet says, 'Where'er I go, whatever realms I see——'"

"The devil a one you'll meet as poor as Ireland," broke in Dalton, who now had thrown himself headlong into a favourite theme. "Other countries get better, but she get's worse."

"They say it's the po-po——" screamed Scroope.

"The Pope, is it?"

"No; the po-potatoes is the cause of everything."

"They might as well hould their prate, then," broke in Peter, whose dialect always grew broader when he was excited. "Why don't they tell me, that if I was too poor to buy broadcloth, it would be better for me to go naked than wear corduroy breeches? Not that I'd mind them, miss!" said he, turning to Martha, who already was blushing at his illustration.

"I fear that the evil lies deeper," sighed Mrs. Ricketts.

"You mean the bogs?" asked Dalton.

"Not exactly, sir; but I allude to those drearier swamps of superstition and ignorance that overlay the land."

Peter was puzzled, and scratched his ear like a man at a nonplus.

"My sister means the pr-pr-pr——"

"The process-servers?"

"No; the pr-priests—the priests," screamed Purvis.

"Bother!" exclaimed Dalton, with an accent of ineffable disdain. "'Tis much you know about Ireland!"

"You don't agree with me then?" sighed Mrs. Ricketts.

"Indeed I do not. Would you take away the little bit of education out of a country where there's nothing but ignorance? Would you extinguish the hopes of heaven amongst them that has nothing but starvation and misery here? Try it—just try it. I put humanity out of the question; but just try it, for the safety's sake! Pat isn't very orderly now, but, faix! you'd make a raal devil of him then, entirely!"

"But popery, my dear sir—the confessional——"

"Bother!" said Dalton, with a wave of his hand. "How much you know about it! 'Tis just as they used to talk long ago about drunkenness. Sure, I remember well when there was all that hue and cry about Irish gentlemen's habits of dissipation, and the whole time nobody took anything to hurt his constitution. Well, it's just the same with confession—everybody uses his discretion about it. *You* have your peccadilloes, and *I* have my peccadilloes, and that young lady there has her—— Well, I didn't mean to make you blush, miss, but 'tis what I'm saying, that nobody, barrin' a fool, would be too hard upon himself!"

"So that it ain't con-confession at all," exclaimed Purvis.

"Who told you that?" said Peter, sternly. "Is it nothing to pay two-and-sixpence in the pound if you were bankrupt to-morrow? Doesn't it show an honest intention, any way?" said he, with a wink.

"Then what are the evils of Ireland?" asked Mrs. Ricketts, with an air of inquiring interest.

"I'll tell you, then," said Dalton, slowly, as he filled a capacious glass with champagne. "It isn't the priests, nor it isn't the potatoes, nor it isn't the Protestants either, though many respectable people think so; for you see we had always priests and potatoes, and a sprinkling of protestants besides; but the real evil of Ireland—and there's no man living knows it better than I do—is quite another thing, and here's what it is." And he stooped down and dropped his voice to a whisper. "'Tis this: 'tis paying money when you haven't it!" The grave solemnity of this enunciation did not seem to make it a whit more intelligible to Mrs. Ricketts, who certainly looked the very type of amazement. "That's what it is," reiterated Dalton, "paying money when you haven't it! There's the ruin of Ireland; and, as I said before, who ought to know better? For you see, when you owe money, and you haven't it, you must get it how you can. You know what that means; and if you don't, I'll tell you. It means mortgages and bond debts; rack-renting and renewals; breaking up an elegant establishment; selling your horses at Dycer's; going to the devil entirely; and not only yourself, but all belonging to you. The tradesmen you dealt with, the country shop where you bought everything, the tithes, the priests' dues—not a farthing left for them."

"But you don't mean to say that people shouldn't p-p-pay their debts?" screamed Purvis.

"There's a time for everything," replied Dalton. "Shaving oneself is a mighty useful process, but you wouldn't have a man get up out of his bed at night to do it? I never was for keeping money—the worst enemy wouldn't say that of me. Spend it freely when you have it; but sure it's not spending to be paying debts due thirty or forty years back, made by your great-grandfather?"

"One should be just before being ge-gen-gene-gene——"

"Faix! I'd be both," said Dalton, who with native casuistry only maintained a discussion for the sake of baffling or mystifying an adversary. "I'd be just to myself and generous to my friends, them's my sentiments; and it's Peter Dalton that says it!"

"Dalton!" repeated Mrs. Ricketts, in a low voice—"didn't he say Dalton, Martha?"

"Yes, sister; it was Dalton."

"Didn't you say your name was Da-Da-a-a——"

"No, I didn't!" cried Peter, laughing. "I said Peter Dalton as plain as a man could speak; and if ever you were in Ireland, you may have heard the name before now."

"We knew a young lady of that name at Florence."

"Is it Kate—my daughter Kate?" cried the old man, in ecstasy.

"Yes, she was called Kate," replied Mrs. Ricketts, whose strategic sight foresaw a world of consequences from the recognition. "What a lovely creature she was!"

"And you knew Kate?" cried Dalton again, gazing on the group with intense interest. "But was it my Kate? perhaps it wasn't mine!"

"She was living in the Mazzarini Palace with Lady Hester Onslow."

"That's her—that's her! Oh, tell me everything you know—tell me all you can think of her. She was the light of my eyes for many a year! Is the old lady sick?" cried he, suddenly, for Mrs. Ricketts had leaned back in her chair, and covered her face with her handkerchief.

"She's only overcome," said Martha, as she threw back her own shawl and prepared for active service; while Scroope, in a burst of generous anxiety, seized the first decanter near him and filled out a bumper.

"She and your da-daughter were like sisters," whispered Scroope to Dalton.

"The devil they were!" exclaimed Peter, who thought their looks must have belied the relationship. "Isn't she getting worse—she's trembling all over her."

Mrs. Ricketts's state now warranted the most acute sympathy, for she threw her eyes wildly about, and seemed like one gasping for life.

"Is she here, Martha? Is she near me—can I see her—can I touch her?" cried she, in accents almost heart-rending.

"Yes, yes; you shall see her; she'll not leave you," said Martha, as if caressing a child. "We must remove her; we must get her out of this."

"To be sure; yes, of course!" cried Dalton. "There's a room here empty. It's a tender heart she has, any way;" and, so saying, he arose, and with the aid of some half-dozen waiters transported the now unconscious Zoe, chair and all, into a small chamber adjoining the Saal.

"This is her father's hand," murmured Mrs. Ricketts, as she pressed Dalton's in her own—"her father's hand.'

"Yes, my dear!" said Dalton, returning the pressure, and feeling a strong desire to blubber, just for sociality's sake.

"If you knew how they loved each other," whispered Martha, while she busied herself pinning cap-ribbons out of the way of cold applications, and covering up lace from the damaging influence of restoratives.

"It's wonderful—it's wonderful!" exclaimed Peter, whose faculties were actually confounded by such a rush of sensations and emotions.

"Make him go back to his dinner, Martha; make him go back," sighed the sick lady, in a half dreamy voice.

"I couldn't eat a bit; a morsel would choke me this minute," said Dalton, who couldn't bear to be outdone in the refinements of excited sensibility.

"She must never be contradicted while in this state," said Martha, confidingly. "All depends on indulgence."

"It's wonderful!" exclaimed Dalton again—"downright wonderful!"

"Then, pray go back; she'll be quite well presently," rejoined Martha, who already, from the contents of a reticule like a carpet-bag, had metamorphosed the fair Zoe's appearance into all the semblance of a patient.

"It's wonderful; it beats Banagher!" muttered Peter, as he returned to the Saal, and resumed his place at the table. The company had already taken their departure, and except Purvis and the General, only a few stragglers remained behind.

"Does she often get them?" asked Peter of Purvis.

"Only when her fee-fee-feelings are worked upon; she's so se-sensitive!"

"Too tender a heart," sighed Peter, as he filled his glass and sighed over an infirmity that he thought he well knew all the miseries of. "And her name, if I might make bould?"

"Ricketts—Mrs. Montague Ricketts. This is Ge-Ge-General Ricketts." At these words the old man looked up, smiled blandly, and lifted his glass to his lips.

"Your good health, and many happy returns to you," said Peter, in reply to the courtesy. "Ricketts—Ricketts. Well, I'm sure I heard the name before."

"In the D-D-Duke's despatches you may have seen it."

"No, no, no. I never read one of them. I heard it here, in Baden. Wait, now, and I'll remember how." Neither the effort at recollection nor the aid of a bumper seemed satisfactory, for Dalton sat musingly for several minutes together. "Well, I thought I knew the name," exclaimed he, at last, with a deep sigh of discomfiture; "'tis runnin' in my head yet—something about chilblains—chilblains."

"But the name is R-R-Ricketts," screamed Purvis.

"And so it is," sighed Peter. "My brain is wool-gathering. By my conscience, I have it now, though!" cried he, in wild delight. "I knew I'd scent it out. It was one Fogles that was here—a chap with a red wig, and deaf as a door-nail."

"Foglass, you mean—Fo-Foglass—don't you?"

"I always called him Fogles; and I'm sure it's as good a name as the other, any day."

"He's so pl-pleasant," chimed in Scroope, who, under the influence of Dalton's champagne, was now growing convivial—"he's so agreeable; always in the highest cir-circles, and dining with no-no-no——"

"With nobs," suggested Peter. "He might do better, and he might do worse. I've seen lords that was as great rapscallions as you'd meet from this to Kilrush."

"But Foglass was always so excl-exclusive, and held himself so high."

"The higher the better," rejoined Dalton, "even if it was out of one's reach altogether; for a more tiresome ould crayture I never forgathered with; and such a bag of stories he had, without a bit of drollery or fun in one of them. You may think that kind of fellow good company in England, but, in my poor country, a red herring and a pint of beer would get you one he couldn't howld a candle to. See now, Mister——"

"P-P-Purvis," screamed the other.

"Mister Purvis—if that's the name—see, now, 'tisn't boasting I am, for the condition we're in wouldn't let any man boast—but it's what I'm saying, the English is a mighty stupid people. They have their London jokes, and, like London porter, mighty heavy they are, and bitter besides, and they have two or three play-actors that makes them die laughing at the same comicalities every day of the year. They get used to them, as they do the smoke, and the noise, and the Thames water; and nothing would persuade them that, because they're rich, they're not agreeable, and social, and witty. And may I never leave this, but you'd find cuter notions of life, droller stories, and more fun, under a dry arch of the Aqueduct of Stoney Batter than if you had the run of Westminster Hall. Look at the shouts of laughter in the Law Coorts—look at the loud laughter in the House of Commons! Oh dear! oh dear! it makes me quite melancholy just to think of it. I won't talk of the Parliament, because it's gone; but take an Irish Coort in Dublin or on the Assizes, at any trial—murder, if you like—and see the fun that goes on: the judge quizzing the jury, and the counsel quizzing the judge, and the pris'ner quizzing all three. There was poor ould Norbury—rest his soul!—I remember well how he couldn't put on the black cap for laughing."

"'And is ju-justice better administered for all that?" cried Purvis.

"To be sure it is. Isn't the laws made to expose villany, and not let people be imposed upon? Sure it's not to hang Paddy Blake you want, but to keep others from following his example. And many's the time in Ireland when, what between the blunderin' of the Crown lawyers, the flaws of the indictment, the conscientious scruples of the jury—you know what that means—and the hurry of the judge to be away to Harrogate or Tunbridge—a villain gets off. But, instead of going out with an elegant bran-new character, a bit of a joke—a droll word spoken during the trial—sticks to him all his life after, till it would be just as well for him to be hanged at once as be laughed at, from Pill-lane to the Lakes of Killarney. Don't I remember well when one of the Regans—Tim, I think it was—was tried for murder at Tralee; there was a something or other they couldn't convict upon. 'Twas his grandfather's age was put down wrong, or the colour of his stepmother's hair, or the nails in his shoes wasn't described right—whatever it was, it was a flaw, as they called it; and a flaw in a brief, like one in a boiler, leaves everybody in hot water. 'Not Guilty,' says the jury, 'for we can't agree.'

"''Tis a droll verdict,' says O'Grady, for he was the judge. 'What d'ye mean?'

"'Most of us is for hanging, my lord; but more of us would let him off.'

"'What will you do, Mr. Attorney?' says the judge. 'Have you any other evidence to bring forward?' And the Attorney-general stooped down, and began whispering with the bench. 'Very well,' says the judge, at last, 'we'll discharge him by proclamation.'

"'Wait a minute, my lord,' says ould Blethers, who got five guineas for the defence, and hadn't yet opened his mouth. 'Before my respected but injured client leaves that dock, I call to your lordship, in the name and on behalf of British justice—I appeal to you, by the eternal principles of our glorious constitution, that he may go forth into the world with a reputation unstained and a character unblemished.'

"'Not so fast, Mister Blethers,' says old Grady—'not so fast. I'm going over Thieve-na-muck Mountain to-night, and, with the blessing of God, I'll keep your unblemished friend where he is till morning.' Now you see the meaning of what I was telling you. 'Tis like tying a kettle to a dog's tail."

It is not quite clear to us whether Purvis comprehended the story or appreciated the illustration, but he smiled, and smirked, and looked satisfied, for Peter's wine was admirable, and iced to perfection. Indeed, the worthy

Scroope, like his sister, was already calculating how to "improve the occasion," and further cultivate the esteem of one whose hospitable dispositions were so excellent. It was just at this moment that Martha glided behind Purvis's chair, and whispered a word in his ear. Whatever the announcement, it required some repetition, before it became quite palpable to his faculties, and it was only after about five minutes that his mind seemed to take in all the bearings of the case.

"Oh, I ha-have it!" cried he. "That's it, eh?" And he winked with a degree of cunning that showed the most timely appreciation of the news.

"Wouldn't the young lady sit down and take something?" said Dalton, offering a seat. "A glass of sweet wine? They've elegant Tokay here."

"Thanks, thanks," said Scroope, apologizing for the bashful Martha; "but she's in a bit of a quandary just now. My sister wishes to return home, and we cannot remember the name of the hotel."

Dalton took a hearty fit of laughing at the absurdity of the dilemma.

"'Tis well," said he, "you weren't Irish. By my conscience! they'd call that a bull;" and he shook his sides with merriment. "How did you get here?"

"We walked," said Martha.

"And which way did you come?"

"Can you remember, Scroope?"

"Yes, I can re-re-member that we crossed a little Platz, with a fountain, and came over a wooden bridge, and then down an alley of li-li-linden-trees."

"To be sure ye did," broke in Dalton; "and the devil a walk of five minutes ye could take in any direction here without seeing a fountain, a wooden bridge, and a green lane. 'Tis the same whichever way you turn, whether you were going to church or the gambling-house. Would you know the name, if you hear it? Was it the Schwan?" Purvis shook his head. "Nor the Black Eagle?—nor the Cour de Londres?—nor the Russie?—nor the Zäringer?" Nor, in fact, any of the cognate hotels of Baden. "Wasn't there a great hall when you entered, with orange-trees all round it, and little couriers, in goold-lace jackets, smoking and drinking beer?"

Scroope thought he had seen something of that sort. "Of course ye did," said Dalton, with another burst of laughter. "'Tis the same in every hotel of the town. There's a clock that never goes, too, and a weather-glass always at 'set fair,' and pictures round the walls of all the wonderful inns in Germany and Switzerland, with coaches-and-four driving in at full gallop, and ladies on the balconies, and saddle-horses waiting, and every diversion in life going on, while, maybe, all the time, the place is dead as Darmstadt."

Scroope recognized the description perfectly, but could give no clue to its whereabouts.

"Maybe 'tis Kaufmayer's. Was it painted yellow outside?"

Scroope thought not. "It hadn't a garden in front?" He couldn't say positively; but, if so, it was a small garden. "He didn't remark two dogs in stone beside the door?" No, he had not seen them!

"Then, by the powers!" exclaimed Peter, "I give it up. Nelly's the only body can make anything out of it."

"And who's Ne-Ne-Nelly?" screamed Purvis.

"My daughter, Miss Dalton," said Peter, haughtily, and as if rebuking the liberty of the question.

Scroope hastened to apologize, and suddenly remembered how frequently he had heard of the young lady from her sister, and how eager Mrs. Ricketts would be to make her acquaintance.

"There's nothing easier than that same," said Dalton. "Just come with me to my little place, and take tea with us. Nelly will be right glad to see them that was kind to her sister, and then we'll try if we can't find out your inn."

"Can we do this, Martha?" cried Scroope, in seeming agitation.

"I'll speak to my sister," mildly replied she.

"Do, then, miss," said Dalton. "Say 'tis just alone, and in the family way, and that we haven't more than ten minutes' walk from this; or, we'll get a coach if she likes."

The very thought of practising hospitality was ecstasy to honest Peter, who, while Martha retired to consult her sister, ordered in a relay of bottles to beguile the time.

"I like that little ould man," said he, confidingly, to Purvis, while he bent a kindly glance on "the general."

"He doesn't say much, and, maybe, he hears less; but he takes his glass pleasantly, and he lays it down when it's empty, with a little sigh. I never knew a bad fellow had that habit."

Scroope hinted that the general was one of the bright stars of the British army.

"I didn't care that he took Tippoo Saib, or Bergen-op-Zoom, and that's a big word—for a wickeder pair of devils, by all accounts never lived—if he's all right here." And Peter touched the left region of his brawny chest. "If he's good and generous, kind to the poor, and steady to his friends, I'd be prouder to know him than if he was 'Bony,' or Brian Maguire!"

Scroope assured him that the general's greatness took nothing from the kindly qualities of his heart; and, indeed, the mild looks of the old man well corroborated the eulogy; and he and Dalton nodded and drank to each other with all the signs of a most amicable understanding.

Martha was not long absent. She returned with all manner of acknowledgments on the part of her sister; but gratitude was so counterbalanced by delicacy—fears of intrusion were so coupled with enthusiastic delight, that poor Dalton was quite unable to unravel the web, and satisfy himself what were her real intentions.

"Is it that she won't come?" said he, in a state of bewilderment.

"Oh, no," said Martha; "she did not mean that."

"Well, then, she is coming," said he, more contentedly.

"She only fears the inconvenience—the trouble she may give Miss Dalton—not to speak of the abruptness of such a visit."

"She doesn't know Nelly, tell her that. She doesn't know Nelly Dalton," said Peter. "'Tis the same girl doesn't care for trouble or inconvenience; just talk to her about Kate, and you'll pay her well for all she could do for you."

"My sister thinks a carriage would be better, she is so very weak," mildly obseved Martha.

"Well, we'll get one in a jiffy. Fritz, my man, send down to the Platz for a shandradan—a waggon, I mean. 'Tis a droll name for a coach." And he laughed heartily at the conceit. "And now, Mr. Purvis, let us finish them before we go. The gen'ral is doing his part like a man. It's wonderful the nourishment wouldn't put flesh on him—you could shave him with his shin bone!" and Dalton stared at the frail figure before him with all the astonishment a great natural curiosity would create.

"What a kind creature! what a really Irish heart!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts, as she slowly sailed into the room, and sank into a chair beside Dalton. "It is like a dream, a delicious dream, all this is. To be here in Baden, with my dear Miss Kate Dalton's father—actually going to drink tea.—What a thought, Martha! to drink tea with dearest Nelly!"

Peter began to fear that the prospect of such happiness was about to overwhelm her sensibilities once more; but fortunately, this time, she became more composed, and discussed the visit with wonderful calm and self-possession.

The carriage now drove up, and although Dalton would greatly have preferred a little longer dalliance over the bottle, he politely gave one arm to Mrs. Ricketts and the other to Martha, issuing forth from the Cursaal in all the pride of a conqueror.

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CHAPTER XVII.

NELLY'S TRIALS.

While Mr. Dalton is accompanying his guests along the Lichtenthal Alley, and describing the various objects of interest on either hand, we will take the opportunity of explaining to our reader why it happened that honest Peter no longer inhabited the little quiet quarters above the toy-shop.

By Kate's liberality, for some time back he had been most freely supplied with money. Scarcely a week passed over without a line from Abel Kraus to say that such or such a sum was placed to his credit; and Dalton once more revelled in those spendthrift habits that he loved. At moments, little flashes of prudential resolve would break upon him. Thoughts of Ireland and of the "old place" would arise, and he would half determine on some course of economy which might again restore him to his home and country. But the slightest prospect of immediate pleasure was sufficient to rout these wise resolves, and Baden was precisely the spot to suggest such "distractions." There was nothing Peter so much liked in the life of this watering-place, as the facility with which acquaintance was formed. The stately reserve of English people was his antipathy, and here he saw that all this was laid aside, and that people conversed freely with the neighbour that chance had given, and that even intimacies grew up between those who scarcely knew each other's names.

Whatever might be thought of these practices by more fastidious critics, to Peter Dalton they appeared admirable. In *his* estimation the world was a great Donnybrook Fair, where everybody came to amuse and be amused. Grave faces and careworn looks, he thought, should stay at home, and not disturb the harmony of what he deemed a great convivial gathering.

It may easily be guessed from this what class of persons found access to his intimacy, and how every smooth-tongued adventurer, every well-dressed and plausible-looking pretender to fashion, became his companion. Nothing but honest Peter's ignorance of foreign languages set any limit to his acquaintance; and, even with this, he had a shake-hands intimacy with every Chevalier d'Industrie of France and Germany, and a cigar-lending-and-lighting treaty with every long-haired Pole in Baden.

As he dined every day at the Cursaal, he seldom returned home of an evening without some three or four chance acquaintances, whom he presented to Nelly without knowing their names. But they were sure to be "tip-top chaps," and "up to everything." Not that the latter eulogy was much of an exaggeration—the majority of them, indeed, well deserving such a panegyric. If Dalton's long stories about Ireland and its joys or grievances were very uninteresting to these gentlemen, they found some compensation in the goodness of his wine and the abundance of his cigars; and hock and tobacco digested many a story which, without such adjuncts, would never have found a listener. Play is, however, so paramount to all else at Baden, that, as the season advanced, even a hot supper from the "Russie" and an ice-pail full of champagne-flasks could not attract the company from the fascinations of the gaming-table, and Peter saw that his choice spirits were deserting him.

"You live so far away," cried one. "Your house is full a mile from the Cursaal."

"There is such a climb-up to that crib of yours, Dalton," cried another. "One can't manage it in this hot weather. Why won't you pitch your tent in the plain? It's like going up the Righi to try and reach your quarters."

Such and such like were the polite admonitions administered by those who wanted a convenient lounge for their spare half-hours, and who, while affecting to think of their friend, were simply consulting what suited themselves. And is this philosophy confined only to Baden? Is not the world full of friendships that, like cab-fares, are regulated by the mile? The man who is half a brother to you while you live on the Boulevard de Gand, becomes enstranged from your bosom when you remove to the Champs Elysées; and in these days of rapid transport, ten minutes' walk would separate the most devoted attachments.

Dalton's pride was at first wounded by these remonstrances; but his second thoughts led him to think them more reasonable, and even elevated the grumblers in his esteem. "Sure, ain't they the height of the fashion? Sure, isn't everybody trying to get them? Is it any wonder they wouldn't scale a mountain for the sake of a glass of wine?" The quiet home, so dear to him by many an association—the little window that looked out upon the Alten Schloss, and beside which Nelly sat with him each evening—the small garden underneath, where Hans cultivated his beautiful carnations, and where many a little figure by Nelly's hand graced some bed or alley—all became now distasteful. "The stairs creaked dreadfully; he didn't think they were quite safe. The ceilings were so low, there was no breathing in the rooms. The hill would be the death of him; he had pains in his knees for half the night after he climbed it." Even the bracing air of the mountain, that was his once boast and pride, was now a "searching, cutting wind, that went through you like a knife." It was a mean-looking little place, too, over a toy-shop, "and Hans himself wasn't what he used to be."

Alas! there was some truth in this last complaint. He was more silent and more absent in manner than ever; sometimes would pass whole days without a word, or remain seated in his little garden absorbed in deep thought. The frequenters of his shop would seek in vain for him, and were it not for Nelly, who, in her father's absence, would steal down the stairs and speak to them, the place would have seemed deserted. On one or two occasions she had gone so far as to be his deputy, and sold little articles for him; but her dread of her father's knowing it had made her ill for half the day after.

It was, then, a dreadful blow to Nelly when her father decided on leaving the place. Not alone that it was dear by so many memories, but that its seclusion enabled her to saunter out at will under the shade of the forest trees, and roam for hours along the little lanes of the deep wood. In Hans, too, she took the liveliest interest. He had been their friend when the world went worst with them; his kindness had lightened many a weary burden, and his wise counsels relieved many a gloomy hour. It was true that of late he was greatly altered. His books, his favourite volumes of Uhland and Tieck, were never opened. He never sat, as of yore, in the garden, burnishing up his quaint old fragments of armour, or gazing with rapture on his strange amulets against evil. Even to the little ballads that she sang he seemed inattentive and indifferent, and would not stop to listen beneath the window as he once did.

His worldly circumstances, too, were declining. He neglected his shop altogether—he made no excursions as of old to Worms or Nuremberg for new toys. The young generation of purchasers found little they cared for in his antiquated stores, and, after laughing at the quaint old devices by which a past age were amused, they left him. It was in vain that Nelly tried to infuse some interest into the pursuit which once had been his passion. All the little histories he used to weave around his toys, the delusions of fancy in which he revelled, were dissipated and gone, and he seemed like one suddenly awakened from a delicious dream to the consciousness of some afflicting fact. He strenuously avoided the Daltons, too, and even watched eagerly for moments of their absence to steal out and walk in the garden. When by chance they did meet, his manner, instead of its old cordiality, was cold and respectful; and he, whose eyes once sparkled with delight when spoken to, now stood uncovered, and with downcast looks, till they went by him.

No wonder, then, if Dalton thought him changed.

"'Tis nothing but envy's killing him, Nelly," said he. "As long as we were poor like himself, he was happy. It gratified the creature's pride that we were behind with the rent; and while he was buying them images, he was a kind of a patron to you; but he can't bear to see us well off—that's the secret of it all. 'Tis our prosperity is poison to him."

To no end did Nelly try to undeceive her father on this head. It was a corollary to his old theory about "the 'bad dhrop' that was always in low people." In vain did she remind him of poor Hanserl's well-tried friendship, and the delicacy of a kindness that in no rank of life could have been surpassed. Dalton was rooted in his opinion, and opposition only rendered him more unforgiving.

Quite forgetting the relations which once subsisted between them, he saw nothing in Hanserl's conduct but black ingratitude. "The little chap," he would say, "was never out of the house; we treated him like one of the family, and look at him now!

"You saw him yourself, Nelly—you saw him shed tears the other day when you spoke of the princess. Was that spite or not—tell me that? He couldn't speak for anger when you told him Frank was an officer."

"Oh, how you mistake these signs of emotion, dearest father."

"Of course I do. I know nothing—I'm too old—I'm in my dotage. 'Tis my daughter Nelly understands the world, and is able to teach me."

"Would that I knew even less of it; would that I could fall back to the ignorance of those days when all our world was within these walls!"

"And be cutting the images, I hope, again!" said he, scornfully; "why don't you wish for that? It was an elegant trade for a young lady of your name and family! Well, if there's anything drives me mad, it's to think that all them blasted figures is scattered about the world, and one doesn't know at what minute they'll turn up against you!"

"Nay, father," said she, smiling sadly; "you once took an interest in them great as my own."

"It only shows, then, how poverty can break a man's spirit."

Discussions like these, once or twice a week, only confirmed Dalton in his dislike to his old abode, and Nelly at last saw that all resistance to his will was hopeless. At last he peremptorily ordered her to give Hans notice of their intended removal, for he had fixed upon a house in the Licthenthal Alley suit to them exactly. It was a villa which had a few months before been purchased and fitted up by a young French count, whose gains at the gaming-table had been enormous. Scarcely, however, had he taken possession of his sumptuous abode, than "luck" turned; he lost everything in the world, and finished his career by suicide! In a colony of gamblers, where superstition has an overweening influence, none could be found rash enough to succeed to so ill-omened a possession; and thus, for nigh half the season, the house continued shut up and unoccupied. Dalton, whose mind was strongly tinctured with fears of this kind, yet felt a species of heroism in showing that he was not to be deterred by the dangers that others avoided; and as Abel Kraus, to whom the property now belonged, continually assured him "it was just the house for *him*," Peter overcame his scruples, and went to see it.

Although of small extent, it was princely in its arrangements. Nothing that French taste and elegance could supply was wanting, and it was a perfect specimen of that costly splendour which in our own day rivals all the gorgeous magnificence of "the Regency." Indeed, it must be owned that honest Peter thought it far too fine to live in; he trod the carpets with a nervous fear of crushing the embroidery, and he sat down on the brocaded sofa with as much terror as though it were glass. How he was ever to go asleep in a bed where Cupid and angels were sculptured in such endless profusion, he couldn't imagine; and he actually shrank back with shame from his own face, as he surveyed it within the silver frame of a costly toilet-glass.

Such were his impressions as he walked through the rooms with Abel, and saw, as the covers were removed from lustres and mirrors, some new and more dazzling object at each moment reveal itself. He listened with astonishment to the account of the enormous sums lavished on these sumptuous articles, and heard how twenty, or thirty, or forty thousand francs had been given for this or that piece of luxury.

What was forty Napoleons a month for such splendour! Kraus was actually lending him the villa at such a price; and what a surprise for Nelly, when he should show her the little drawing-room in rose-damask he meant for herself; and then there was a delightful arbour in the garden to smoke in; and the whole distance from the Cursaal was not above ten minutes' walk. Peter's fancy ran over rapidly all the jollifications such a possession would entail; and if he wished, for his own sake, that there were less magnificence, he consoled himself by thinking of the effect it would have upon others. As he remarked to himself, "There's many thinks more of the gilding than the gingerbread!"

If Nelly's sorrow at leaving Hanserl's house was deep and sincere, it became downright misery when she learned to what they were about to remove. She foresaw the impulse his extravagance would receive from such a residence, and how all the costliness of decoration would suggest wasteful outlay. Her father had not of late confided to her the circumstances of his income. He who once could not change a crown without consulting her, and calling in her aid to count the pieces and test their genuineness, would now negotiate the most important dealings without her knowledge. From his former distrust of Kraus he grew to believe him the perfection of honesty. There is something so captivating to a wasteful man in being freely supplied with money—with receiving his advances in a spirit of apparent frankness—that he would find it impossible to connect such liberality with a mean or interested motive. Kraus's little back room was then a kind of California, where he could dig at discretion; and if in an unusual access of prudence, honest Peter would ask, "How do we stand, Abel?" Kraus was sure to be too busy to look at the books, and would simply reply, "What does it matter? How much do you want?" From such a dialogue as this Dalton would issue forth the happiest of men, muttering to himself, how differently the world would have gone with him if he "had known that little chap thirty or forty years ago."

Without one gleam of comfort—with terror on every side—poor Nelly took possession of her splendour to pass days of unbroken sorrow. Gloomy as the unknown future seemed, the tidings she received of Kate and Frank were still sadder.

From her sister she never heard directly. A few lines from Madame de Heidendorf, from a country house near St. Petersburg, told her that the prince had not succeeded in obtaining the imperial permission, and that the marriage was deferred indefinitely; meanwhile, the betrothed princess lived a life of strict seclusion as the etiquette required, seeing none but such members of the royal family as deigned to visit her. Poor Nelly's heart was nigh to bursting as she thought over her dear Kate—the gay and brilliant child, the happy, joyous girl, now pining away in dreary imprisonment. This image was never out of her mind, and she would sit hour after hour in tears for her poor sister. What future happiness, however great it might be, could repay a youth passed in misery like this? What splendour could efface the impression of this dreary solitude, away from all who loved and cared for her?

Of Frank, the tidings were worse again. A short and scarcely intelligible note from Count Stephen informed her that, "although the court-martial had pronounced a sentence of death, the Emperor, rather than stain a name distinguished by so many traits of devotion to his house, had commuted the punishment to imprisonment for life at Moncacs. There was," he added, "a slight hope that, after some years, even this might be relaxed, and banishment from the imperial dominions substituted. Meanwhile," said the old soldier, "I have retired for ever from a career where, up to this hour, no stain of dishonour attached to me. The name which I bore so long with distinction is now branded with shame, and I leave the service to pass the few remaining days of my life wherever obscurity can best hide my sorrow and my ignominy!"

Although Nelly at once answered this afflicting letter, and wrote again and again to Vienna, to Milan, and to Prague, she never received any reply, nor could obtain the slightest clue to what the sentence on Frank referred. To conceal these terrible events from her father was her first impulse; and although she often accused herself of duplicity for so doing, she invariably came round to her early determination. To what end embitter the few moments of ease he had enjoyed for years past? Why trouble him about what is irremediable, and make him miserable about those from whom his careless indifference asks nothing and requires nothing? Time enough when the future looks brighter to speak of the sorrows of the past!

This task of secrecy was not a difficult one. Dalton's was not a nature to speculate on possible mischances so much as to hope for impossible good turns of fortune; and when he knew that Kate had sent him money, and Frank did not ask for any, the measure of his contentment was filled. Kate was a princess, and Frank an officer of hussars; and that they were as happy as the day was long he would have taken an oath before any "justice of the quorum," simply because he saw no reason why they ought not to be so; and when he drank their healths every day after dinner, and finished a bumper of champagne to their memory, he perfectly satisfied his conscience that he had discharged every parental duty in their behalf. His "God bless you, my darling child!" was the extent of his piety as of his affection; and so he lived in the firm belief that he had a heart overflowing with good, and kind, and generous sentiments. The only unpleasant feelings he had arose for Nelly. Her eyes, that in spite of all her efforts showed recent tears, her pale face, her anxious, nervous manner, worried and amazed him. "There's something strange about that girl," he would say to himself; "she would sing the whole day long when we hadn't a shilling beyond the price of our dinner; she was as merry as a lark, cutting out them images till two or three o'clock of a morning; and now that we have lashings and leavings of everything, with all manner of diversions about us, there she sits moping and fretting the whole day." His ingenuity could detect no explanation for this. "To be sure, she was lame, and it might grieve her to look at dancing, in which she could take no part. But when did she ever show signs of an envious nature? She was growing old, too—at least she was six or seven-and-twenty—and no prospect of being married; but was Nelly the girl to grieve over this? Were not all her affections and all her hopes home-bound? 'Twasn't fretting to be back in Ireland that she could be! —she knew little of it before she left it." And thus he was at the end of all his surmises without being nearer the solution.

We have said enough to show that Nelly's sorrow was not causeless, and that she had good reason to regret the days of even their hardest fortune.

"Had we been but contented as we were!" cried she; "had we resisted ambitions for which we were unfitted, and turned away from 'paths in life' too steep and too arduous for our strength, we might have been happy now! Who can say, too, what development of mind and intelligence should not have come of this life of daily effort and exertion? Frank would have grown manly, patient, and self-relying—Kate would have been, as she ever was, the light of our home, making us sharers in all those gifts of her own bright and happy nature—while even I might have risen to worthier efforts of skill than those poor failures I have now to blush for."

Such were the regrets which filled her heart, as she sat many an hour in solitude, grieving over the past, and yet afraid to face the future.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ACT OF SETTLEMENT.

WERE we disposed to heroics, we might compare Mrs. Ricketts's sensations, on entering the grounds of the villa, to the feelings experienced by the ancient Gauls when, from the heights of the Alps, they gazed down on the fertile plains of Italy. If less coloured by the glorious hues of conquering ambition, they were not the less practical. She saw that, with her habitual good fortune, she had piloted the Ricketts's barque into a safe and pleasant anchorage, where she might at her leisure refit and lay in stores for future voyaging. Already she knew poor Dalton, as she herself said, from "cover to cover"—she had sounded all the shallows and shoals of his nature, and read his vanity, his vainglorious importance, and his selfish pride, as though they were printed on his forehead. Were Nelly to be like Kate, the victory, she thought, could not be very difficult. "Let her have but one predominant passion, and be it love of admiration, avarice, a taste for dress, for scandal, or for grand society, it matters not, I'll soon make her my own."

"This will do, Martha!" whispered she, in Miss Ricketts's ear, as they drove up the approach.

"I think so," was the low-uttered reply.

"Tell Scroope to be cautious—very cautious," whispered she once more; and then turned to Dalton, to expatiate on the beauty of the grounds, and the exquisite taste displayed in their arrangement.

"It has cost me a mint of money," said Dalton, giving way irresistibly to his instinct of boastfulness. "Many of those trees you see there came from Spain and Portugal; and not only the trees, but the earth that's round them."

"Did you hear that, Martha?" interposed Mrs. Ricketts. "Mr. Dalton very wisely remarks that man is of all lands, while the inferior productions of nature require their native soils as a condition of existence."

"Yes, indeed," said Dalton, fathering the sentiment at once; "'tis only the blacks that can't bear the cowld. But, after all, maybe they're not the same as ourselves."

"I own I never could think them so," smiled Mrs. Ricketts, as though the very appearance of Peter Dalton had confirmed the prejudice.

"Faix! I'm glad to hear you say that," said he, delightedly. "'Tis many's the battle Nelly and me has about that very thing. There's the villa, now—what d'ye think of it?"

"Charming—beautiful—a paradise!"

"Quite a paradise!" echoed Martha.

"'Tis a mighty expensive paradise, let me tell you," broke in Peter. "I've a gardener, and four chaps under him, and sorrow a thing I ever see them do but cut nosegays and stick little bits of wood in the ground, with hard names writ on them; that's what they call gardening here. As for a spade or a hoe, there's not one in the country; they do everything with a case-knife and watering-pot."

"You amaze me," said Mrs. Ricketts, who was determined on being instructed in horticulture.

"There's a fellow now, with a bundle of moss-roses for

Nelly, and there's another putting out the parrot's cage under a tree—that's the day's work for both of them."

"Are you not happy to think how your ample means diffuse ease and enjoyment on all round you? Don't tell me that the pleasure you feel is not perfect ecstasy."

"That's one way of considering it," said Dalton, dubiously, for he was not quite sure whether he could or could not yield his concurrence.

"But if people didn't la-la-la——"

"Lay a bed, you mean," cried Dalton; "that's just what they do; a German wouldn't ask to awake at all, if it wasn't to light his pipe."

"I meant la-la-labour; if they didn't la-labour the ground, we should all be starved."

"No political economy, Scroope," cried Mrs. Ricketts; "I will not permit it. That dreadful science is a passion with him, Mr. Dalton."

"Is it?" said Peter, confusedly, to whose ears the word economy only suggested notions of saving and sparing. "I can only say," added he, after a pause, "tastes differ, and I never could abide it at all."

"I was certain of it," resumed Mrs. Ricketts; "but here comes a young lady towards us—Miss Dalton, I feel it must be."

The surmise was quite correct. It was Nelly, who, in expectation of meeting her father, had walked down from the house, and now, seeing a carriage, stood half irresolute what to do.

"Yes, that's Nelly," cried Dalton, springing down to the ground; "she'll be off now, for she thinks it's visitors come to see the place."

While Dalton hastened to overtake his daughter, Mrs. Ricketts had time to descend and shake out all her plumage—a proceeding of manual dexterity to which Martha mainly contributed; indeed, it was almost artistic in its way, for while feathers were disposed to droop here, and lace taught to fall gracefully there, the fair Zoe assumed the peculiar mood in which she determined on conquest.

"How do I look, Martha?" said she, bridling up, and then smiling.

"Very sweetly—quite charming," replied Martha.

"I know that," said the other, pettishly; "but am I maternal—am I affectionate?"

"Very maternal—most affectionate," was the answer.

"You're a fool!" said Mrs. Ricketts, contemptuously; but had barely time to restore her features to their original blandness, when Nelly came up. The few words in which her father had announced Mrs. Ricketts spoke of her as one who had known and been kind to Kate, and Nelly wanted no stronger recommendation to her esteem.

The quiet, gentle manner of the young girl, the almost humble simplicity of her dress, at once suggested to Mrs. Ricketts the tone proper for the occasion, and she decided on being natural; which, to say truth, was the most remote thing from nature it is well possible to conceive. Poor Nelly was not, however, a very shrewd critic, and she felt quite happy to be so much at her ease as they walked along to the house together.

Mrs. Ricketts saw that Kate was the key-note to all her sister's affection, and therefore talked away of her unceasingly. To have heard her, one would have thought they had been inseparable, and that Kate had confided to the dear old lady the most secret thoughts of her heart. The amiable Zoe did, indeed, contrive to effect this rather by the aid of an occasional sigh, a tone of lamentation and sorrow, than by direct assertion; all conveying the impression that she was cut to the heart about something, but would rather be "brayed in a mortar" than tell it. Martha's mild and submissive manner won rapidly on Nelly, and she wondered whether Kate had liked her. In fact, the visitors were all so very unlike the usual company her father presented to her, she felt disposed to think the best of them; and even Scroope came in for a share of her good opinion.

The interior of the villa changed the current of conversation, and now Mrs. Ricketts felt herself at home examining the rich brocade of the hangings, the bronzes, and the inlaid tables.

"Lyons silk—twenty-four francs a mètre!" whispered she to Scroope.

"I thought they hadn't a s-s-sixpence," observed the other.

"And these things are new, Scroope!—all new!"

"I—I—I was observing that, sister."

"What a creature he is, Scroope!—what a creature!"

"And the daughter, I suspect, is only ha-ha-half-witted."

"Humph!" ejaculated Zoe, as though she did not quite coincide with that opinion.

The confidential dialogue was broken in upon by Dalton, who, having dragged the poor general over the terrace and the flower-garden, was now showing him the inside of the dwelling.

"If I could but see dear Kate here!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts, as she slowly sank into a downy chair, "I'd fancy this was home. It's all so like herself,—such graceful elegance, such tasteful splendour."

"It's neat—I think it's neat," said Dalton, almost bursting with the effort to repress his delight.

"Oh, sir, it's princely! It's worthy the great name of its possessor. Dear Kate often told me of her beautiful home."

"I thought you li-li-lived over a toy-shop? Foglass said you li-lived——"

"So we did, while the place was getting ready," said Dalton, flushing.

"Just let me sit here, and watch the rippling of that shining river!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts, laying her hand on Dalton's, and, by a melting look, withdrawing him from Scroope's unlucky reminiscence. "If I could but pass the night here, I feel it would be ecstasy."

"What easier, if it's in earnest you are?" cried Dalton. "We never make use of this little drawing-room. Nelly will get you a bed put up in five minutes."

"Isn't that Irish, Scroope?—isn't that what I often told you of Ireland?" cried Zoe, as her eyes glistened.

"Well, but I'm not joking," resumed Dalton; "small as the place is, we can make room for you all. We'll put Miss Martha in Nelly's room, and the general can have mine; and there's a mighty snug little place for you in the garden."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear Ireland, how I love you!" said Mrs. Ricketts, closing her eyes, and affecting to talk in her sleep.

"There's worse places," murmured Dalton, who drank in national flattery as the pleasantest "tipple" after personal. "But say the word, now, and see if we won't make you comfortable."

"Comfortable!—you mean happy, supremely happy," ejaculated Zoe.

"And there's no inconvenience in it, none whatever," continued Dalton, who now was breast-high in his plot. "That's a fine thing in this little town of Baden; you can have everything at a moment's warning, from a sirloin of beef to a strait-waistcoat."

Now Mrs. Ricketts laughed till her eyes overflowed with tears, at Dalton's drollery; and Scroope, too, cackled his own peculiar cry; and the old general chimed in with a faint wheezing sound—a cross between the wail of an infant and a death-rattle; in the midst of which Dalton hurried away to seek Nelly, who was showing the garden to Martha.

"Now, mind me, Scroope," cried Mrs. Ricketts, as soon as they were alone, "no selfishness, no eternal trouble about your own comfort. We may probably pass the summer here, and——"

"But I—I—I won't sleep under the stairs, I—I—I promise you," cried he, angrily.

"You had a dear little room, with a lovely view, at Noëringen. You are most ungrateful."

"It was a d-dear little room, six feet square, and looked out on a tannery. My skin would have been leather if I had st-st-stayed another week in it."

"Martha slept in a wardrobe, and never complained."

"For that matter, I passed two months in a sh-shower-bath," cried Scroope; "but I—I won't do it a-any more."

To what excesses his rebellious spirit might have carried him it is hard to say, for Dalton now came up with Nelly, who was no less eager than her father to offer the hospitalities of the villa. At the hazard of detracting in the reader's esteem from all this generous liberality, we feel bound to add that neither Dalton nor his daughter ever speculated on the lengthened sojourn which Mrs. Ricketts's more prophetic spirit foreshadowed.

The accidental mistake about the hotel first suggested the offer, which of course the next day was sure to obviate. And now, as it has so often been an unpleasant task to record little flaws and frailties of the Ricketts's nature, let us take the opportunity of mentioning some traits of an opposite kind, which, even as a "set-off," are not valueless. Nothing could be more truly amiable than the conduct of the whole family when the question of their stay had been resolved upon. Had Scroope been bred a cabinet-maker, he couldn't have been handier with bed-screws, laths, and curtain-rods. Martha, divested of shawl and bonnet, arranged toilet-tables and looking-glasses like the most accomplished housemaid; while, reclining in her easy-chair, the fair Zoe vouchsafed praises on all the efforts around her, and nodded, as Jove might, on mortal endeavours to conciliate him.

Poor Nelly was in ecstasy at all this goodness; such a united family was a perfect picture. Nothing seemed to inconvenience them—nothing went wrong. There was a delightfully playful spirit in the way they met and conquered little difficulties, and whenever hard pushed by fate, there was a wonderful reticule of Mrs. Ricketts's which was sure to contain something to extricate them at once. Since Aladdin's lamp, there never was such a magical contrivance as that bag; and the Wizard of the North, who makes pancakes in a gentleman's hat and restores it unstained, and who, from the narrow limits of a snuff-box, takes out feathers enough to stuff a pillow-case, would have paled before the less surprising but more practical resources of the "Ricketts's sack."

Various articles of toilet necessity, from objects peculiar to the lady's own, down to the general's razors, made their appearance. An impertinent curiosity might have asked why a lady going to dine at a public ordinary should have carried about with her such an array of flannel jackets, cordials, lotions, slippers, hair-brushes, and nightcaps; but it is more than likely that Mrs. Ricketts would have smiled at the short-sighted simplicity of the questioner, as she certainly did at poor Nelly's face of quiet astonishment.

It was a downright pleasure to make sacrifices for people so ready to accommodate themselves to circumstances, and who seemed to possess a physical pliancy not inferior to the mental one. The general wanted no window to shave at. Martha could bestow herself within limits that seemed impossible to humanity. As for Scroope, he was what French dramatists call a "grand utility"—now climbing up ladders to arrange curtain-rods, now descending to the cellars in search of unknown and nameless requisites. A shrewd observer might have wondered that such extensive changes in the economy of a household were effected for the sake of one night's accommodation; but this thought neither occurred to Dalton nor his daughter, who were, indeed, too full of admiration for their guests' ingenuity and readiness, to think of anything else.

As for honest Peter, a house full of company was his delight. As he took his place that evening at the supper-table, he was supremely happy. Nor was it wonderful, considering the pleased looks and bland faces that he saw on each side of him. All his stories were new to his present audience. Mount Dalton and its doings were an anecdotic mine, of which they had never explored a single "shaft." The grandeur of his family was a theme all listened to with interest and respect; and as Mrs. Ricketts's flattery was well-timed and cleverly administered, and Scroope's blunders fewer and less impertinent than usual, the evening was altogether a very pleasant one, and, as the cant is, went off admirably.

If Nelly had now and then little misgivings about the over-anxiety to please displayed by Mrs. Ricketts, and a certain exaggerated appreciation she occasionally bestowed upon her father's "Irishism," she was far too distrustful of her own judgment not to set down her fears to ignorance of life and its conventionalities. "It would ill become *her*," she thought, "to criticize people so well-bred and so well-mannered." And this modest depreciation of herself saved the others.

It was thus that the hosts felt towards their guests as they wished them good night, and cordially shook hands at parting.

"As agreeable an old lady as ever I met," said Dalton to his daughter; "and not wanting in good sense either."

"I like Miss Martha greatly," said Nelly. "She is so gently-mannered and so mild, I'm sure Kate was fond of her."

"I like them all but the little chap with the stutter. He seems so curious about everything."

"They are all so pleased—so satisfied with everything," said Nelly, enthusiastically.

"And why wouldn't they? There's worse quarters, let me tell you, than this! It isn't under Peter Dalton's roof that people go to bed hungry. I wouldn't wonder if they'd pass a day or two with us."

"Do you think so?" said Nelly, scarcely knowing whether to be pleased or the reverse.

"We'll see to-morrow," said Dalton, as he took his candle and began to climb up the stairs to the room which he was now to occupy instead of his own chamber, singing, as he went, an old ballad:

> "The whole Balrothery hunt was there, and welcome were they all!
> With two in a bed, and four on the stairs, and twelve in the Bachelor's hall!"

Leaving Dalton to con over the stray verses of his once favourite ballad as he dropped off to sleep, we turn for a moment to the chamber which, by right of conquest, was held by the fair Zoe, and where, before a large mirror, she was now seated; while Martha was engaged upon that wonderful head, whose external machinery was almost as complex as its internal. Mrs. Ricketts had resolved upon adopting a kind of materno-protective tone towards Nelly; and the difficulty now was to hit off a coiffure to sustain that new character. It should combine the bland with the dignified, and be simple without being severe. There was something Memnonic in that large old head, from which the grey hair descended in massive falls, that seemed worthy of better things than a life of petty schemes and small intrigues; and the patient Martha looked like one whose submissive nature should have been bent to less ignoble burdens than the capricious fretfulness of a tiresome old woman. But so is it every day in life; qualities are but what circumstances make them, and even great gifts become but sorry aids when put to base uses!

There was another figure in the group, and for him no regrets arise as to talents misapplied and tastes perverted. Nature had created Scroope Purvis for one line of character, and he never ventured to walk out of it. In a large and showy dressing-gown belonging to his host, and a pair of most capacious slippers from the same wardrobe, Scroope had come down to assist at a Cabinet Council. He had just performed a voyage of discovery round the house, having visited every available nook, from the garret to the cellars, and not omitting the narrow chamber to which Nelly herself had retired, with whom he kept up an amicable conversation for several minutes, under pretence of having mistaken his room. Thence he had paid a visit to old Andy's den; and, after a close scrutiny of the larder, and a peep between the bars at the dairy, came back with the honest conviction that he had done his duty.

"It's sm-small, sister—it's very small," said he, entering her chamber.

"It's not smaller than Mrs. Balfour's cottage at the Lakes, and you know we spent a summer there," said the lady, rebukingly.

"But we had it all to—to our-selves, sister."

"So much the worse. A cook and a cellar are admirable fixtures.—The curls lower down on the sides, Martha. I don't want to look like Grisi." There was something comforting in the last assurance, for it would have sorely tested poor Martha's skill had the wish been the reverse.

"They don't seem to ha-have been long here, sister. The knifeboard in the scullery hasn't been used above a—a few times. I shouldn't wonder if old Da-Da-Dalton won the villa at play."

"Fudge!—Fuller on the brow, Martha—more expansive there."

"Isn't the girl vulgar, sister?" asked Scroope.

"Decidedly vulgar, and dressed like a fright!—I thought it was only you, Martha, that rolled up the back hair like a snail's shell." Martha blushed, but never spoke. "I suppose she's the same that used to cut the pipe-heads and the umbrella tops. I remarked that her fingers were all knotted and hard."

"Her smile is very pleasing," submitted Martha, diffidently.

"It's like her father's laugh—far too natural for my taste! There's no refinement, no elegance, in one of your sweet, unmeaning smiles. I thought I had told you that at least twenty times, Martha. But you have grown selfwilled and self-opinionated of late, and I must say, you couldn't have a graver fault! Correct it in time, I beseech you."

"I'll try," said Martha, in a very faint voice.

"If you try, you'll succeed. Look at your brother. See what he has become. There's an example might stimulate you."

Another and a far deeper sigh was all Martha's acknowledgment of this speech.

"He was the same violent, impetuous creature that you are. There, you needn't tear my hair out by the roots to prove it! He wouldn't brook the very mildest remonstrance; he was passionate and irrestrainable, and see—see what I have made him. Oh, you spiteful creature, how you hurt me!"

This cry of pain was not quite causeless, for Martha was trembling from head to foot, and actually only saved herself from falling by a mechanical clutch at something like a horse's tail. With many excuses, and in a voice broken by regrets, she resumed her task with a vigorous effort for success, while Mrs. Ricketts and Purvis exchanged glances of supreme contempt.

"I speak to you, Martha," resumed she, "for your own sake. You cannot see what all the world sees—the sinful selfishness of your nature—a vice, I must say, the less pardonable, that you live beneath the shadow of my counsels!—Scroope, don't creak that chair—sit upon that stool there.—Now that we shall probably spend two months here——"

"Here! Do—do you m-mean here?" cried Purvis.

"Of course I mean here, sir. There's nothing in the shape of a lodging to be had under three or four hundred francs a month. This is a very sweet place, and when the old gentleman can be induced to take a room in the town for himself, and that his daughter learns, as she will—though certainly not from Martha—what is due to *me* it will be comfortable and convenient. We'll ask the princess, too, to spend a week with us; for who knows, in the present state of politics, to what corner of Germany we may yet be reduced to fly!"

"How will you m-m-manage with Haggerstone and the rest, when they arrive, sister?"

"Easily enough. I'll show them that it's for their advantage that we are here. It is true that we agreed to take a house together; but every plan is modified by the events of the campaign. Petrolaffsky will be content if Mr. Dalton plays piquet; the colonel will like his claret and Burgundy; and Foglass will be pleased with the retirement that permits him to prosecute his attentions to Martha."

Poor Martha blushed crimson at the tone rather, even than the words of the speech, for, when nothing else offered, it was the practice of Mrs. Ricketts to insinuate coquetry as among her sister's defects.

"You needn't look so much confused, my dear," resumed the torturer, "I'm certain it's not the first affair of the kind you've known."

"Oh, sister!" cried Martha, in a voice of almost entreaty.

"Not that I think there would be anything unsuitable in the match; he is probably fifty-eight or nine—sixty at most—and, excepting deafness and the prosy tendency natural to his time of life, pretty much like everybody else."

"You know, sister, that *he* never thought of *me*, nor *I* of *him*."

"I know that I am not in the confidence of either party," said Mrs. Ricketts, bridling; and I also know I am sincerely happy that my head is not crammed with such fiddle-faddle. Before the great event comes off, however, you will have time to attend to something else, and therefore I beg you will keep in mind what I am about to say to you. We are here, Martha," resumed she, with all the solemnity of a judicial charge—"we are here by no claims of relationship or previous friendship. No secret ties of congenial tastes bind us up together. No common attachment to some other dear creature forms a link between us. We are here as much by chance as one can venture to call anything in this unhappy world. Let us, then, show Fortune that we are not unworthy of her goodness, by neglecting nothing which may strengthen our position and secure our permanence. In a word, Martha, throw over all your selfishness—forget the miserable egotism that besets you, and study that young girl's character and wishes. She has never been courted in life—flatter her; she has never been even thought of—show her every consideration; she is evidently of a thoughtful turn, and nobody can mope better than yourself. Insinuate yourself day by day into little household affairs, mingling counsels here and warnings there—always on the side of economy—so that while affecting only to play with the reins, you'll end by driving the coach."

"I'm afraid I've no head for all this, sister."

"Of course you haven't, nor for anything else without *me* to guide you. I'm perfectly aware of that. But you can learn. You can at least obey!"

"My sister means that you can st-st-struggle against the natural w-w-wilfulness of your d-disposition," cackled in Purvis.

"I'll do my best," murmured Martha, in a voice of humility.

"Women are so fond of sa-saving," cried Scroope, "you'll always be safe when you c-c-cut down the estimates."

"Attend to that, Martha," remarked Mrs. Ricketts.

"Find out the price of ch-chickens, and always buy them a kreutzer cheaper than she has done."

"There is nothing gives such an ascendency in a house as showing that you can maintain the establishment for fourpence less per quarter," said Zoe, gravely. "I have known connubial happiness, that has stood the test of temper and illness for years, wrecked on the small rock of a cook's bill. Like all wasteful men, you may be sure that this Dalton has many miserly habits. Learn these, and indulge them. There was that poor Marquis of Binchley, that never dined without a hundred wax candles in the room, left all his fortune to a nephew he once found collecting the sealing-wax from old letters and making it up for fresh use. Reflect upon this, Martha; and always bear in mind that the vices of mankind are comparatively uninstructive. It is their foibles, their small weaknesses, that teach everything."

"When Ha-Ha-Haggerstone comes, and finds no room for him, you'll ha-ha-have the devil to pay."

"He shall take it out in dinners, Scroope; and what between drinking Dalton's wine with him, and abusing him behind his back, you'll see he'll be perfectly happy."

"How long do you purpose to st-stay here, sister?" asked Scroope.

"Ask the butterfly how long the rose and the hyacinth will bloom," said Mrs. Ricketts, pensively; for, by dint of smiling at herself in the looking-glass, she had come round to that mock poetical vein which ran through her strange incongruous nature. "And now good night, dears," sighed she. "These are sweet moments, but they are paid for at a price. Exhausted energies will have repose." She held out her hand to Martha, who kissed it respectfully, and then waved a graceful adieu to Purvis, as he retired.

"Sister Zoe has a head for everything," muttered Purvis to Martha. "There's nothing she's not up to."

"She's very clever indeed!" sighed Martha.

"And this isn't the worst h-hit she has ever made. It was d-deucedly well done to get in here."

Either Martha didn't concur in the sentiment, or Scroope's satisfaction did not need any backing, for she made no reply.

"They've given me a capital room; I fa-fancy Dalton's own, for I found a heap of old bills and letters in a table-drawer, and something like a—like a—like a writ"—here he laughed till the tears came at the drollery of the thought—"in the pocket of his dressing-gown."

"Good-night," said Martha, softly, as she glided into the little chamber allotted to her. Poor Martha! Save Nelly's, hers was the saddest heart beneath that roof. For the first time in all her long years of trial, a ray of doubt, a flash of infidelity had broken upon her mind, and the thought of her sister-in-law's infallibility became for a moment suspected. It was not that abused and outraged submission was goaded into rebellion; it was dormant reason that was suddenly startled into a passing wakefulness. It was like one of those fitful gleams of intelligence which now and then dart across the vacuity of dulled intellects, and, like such, it was only a meteor-flash, and left no trace of light behind it. Even in all its briefness the anguish it gave was intense; it was the delusion of a whole life rent asunder at once, and the same shock which should convulse the moral world of her thoughts would rob her of all the pleasantest fancies of her existence. If Zoe were not all goodness and all genius, what was to become of all the household gods of the Villino? Titians would moulder away into stained and smoked panels; "Sèvres" and "Saxe" would fall down to pasteboard and starch; carved oak and ebony would resolve themselves into leather; and even the friendship of princes and the devotion of philosophers be only a mockery, a sham, and a snare!

Poor Martha! Deprived of these illusions, life was but one unceasing round of toil; while, aided by imagination, she could labour on unwearied. Without a thought of deception, she gloried in the harmless frauds to which she contributed, but couldn't resist the contagion of credulity around her. How easily could such a spirit have been moulded to every good gift, and qualities like these have been made to minister to comfort and happiness, and the faith that was given to gilt paper, and glue, and varnish, elevated to all that is highest in the moral and material world!

And now they were all in slumber beneath that roof—all save one. Poor Nelly sat at her window, tearful and sad. In the momentary excitement of receiving her guests she had forgotten her cares; but now they came back upon her, coupled with all the fears their wasteful habits could suggest. At times she blamed herself for the tame cowardice which beset her, and restrained her from every effort to avert the coming evil; and at times she resigned herself to the gloomy future, with the stern patience of the Indian who saw his canoe swept along into the rapids above the cataract. There was not one to turn to for advice or counsel, and the strength that would have sustained her in any other trial was here sapped by the dread of giving pain to her father. "It would ill become *me* to give him cause for sorrow—I, that of all his children have ministered nothing to his pride nor his happiness!" Such was the estimate she held of herself, and such the reasoning that flowed from it.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE "CURSAAL."

THE attempt to accommodate a company to which the house was unsuited would have been a source of painful annoyance to most men. To Peter Dalton it was unqualified pleasure. The subversion of all previous arrangements, the total change in the whole order of domesticity, were his delight. The changing of rooms, the being sent to sleep in strange and inconvenient corners, the hurry-scurry endeavours to find a substitute for this or a representative for that, the ingenious devices to conceal a want or to supply a deficiency, afforded him the most lively amusement; and he went about rubbing his hands, and muttering that it did his heart good. It was "so like Mount Dalton when he was a boy."

All Mrs. Ricketts's softest blandishments were so many charms clean thrown away. His thoughts were centered on himself and his own amiable qualities, and he revelled in the notion that the world did not contain another as truly generous and hospitable as Peter Dalton. In accordance with the singular contradictions of which his character was made up, he was willing to incur every sacrifice of personal inconvenience, if it only served to astonish some one, or excite a sensation of surprise at his good-nature; and while all Nelly's efforts were to conceal the inconveniences these hospitalities inflicted, Peter was never satisfied except when the display could reflect honour on himself, and exact a tribute of flattery from his guests. Nor was he all this time in ignorance of Mrs. Ricketts's character. With native shrewdness he had at once detected her as an "old soldier;" he saw the practised readiness of her compliance with everything; he saw the spirit of accommodation in which she met every plan or project; he knew the precise value of her softest look or her sweetest smile; and yet he was quite content with possessing the knowledge, without any desire to profit by it. Like one who sits down to play with sharpers, and resolves that either the stake shall be a trifle or the roguery be very limited, he surrendered himself to the fair Zoe's seductions with this sort of a reservation to guide him.

If Mrs. Ricketts did not cheat him by her goodness, she took her revenge by the claims of her grandeur. Her intimacy with great people—the very greatest—exalted her to the highest place in Dalton's esteem. Honest Peter knew nothing of the years of toil and pain—the subtle arts—the deep devices—the slights—the affronts—the stern rebuffs here, the insolent denials there—by which these acquisitions, precarious as they were, had been won. He did not know how much of the royalty was left-handed, nor how much of the nobility was factitious. All he could see was the gracious salutes wafted to her from coroneted carriages, the soft smiles wafted from high places, the recognitions bestowed on her in the promenade, and the gracious nods that met her in the Cursaal.

Mrs. Ricketts was perfect in all the skill of this peculiar game, and knew how, by the most ostentatious display of respect in public, not only to exalt the illustrious personage who deigned to acknowledge her, but also to attach notice to herself as the individual so highly favoured. What reverential curtseys would she drop before the presence of some small German "Hochheit," with a gambling-house for a palace, and a roulette-table for an exchequer! What devotional observances would she perform in front of the chair of some snuffy old Dowager "Herzogin," of an unknown or forgotten principality! How pertinaciously would she remain standing till some "Durchlaut" was "out of the horizon;" or how studiously would she retire before the advancing step of some puny potentate—a monarch of three hussars and thirty chamberlains! Poor Peter was but a sorry pupil in this "School of Design." He found it difficult to associate rank with unwashed faces and unbrushed clothes; and, although he *did* bow, and flourish his hat, and perform all the other semblances of respect, he always gave one the idea of an irreverential Acolyte at the back of a profoundly impressed and dignified high priest.

Dalton was far more at his ease when he paraded the rooms with Mrs. Ricketts on one arm, and Martha on the other, enjoying heartily all the notice they elicited, and accepting, as honest admiration, the staring wonderment and surprise their appearance was sure to excite. Mrs. Ricketts, who had always something geographical about her taste in dress, had this year leaned towards the Oriental, and accordingly presented herself before the admiring world of Baden in a richly-spangled muslin turban, and the very shortest of petticoats, beneath which appeared a pair of ample trousers, whose deep lace frills covered the feet, and even swept the floor; a paper-knife of silver gilt, made to resemble a yataghan, and a smelling-bottle, in the counterfeit of a pistol, glittered at her girdle, which, with the aid of a very well arched pair of painted eyebrows, made up as presentable a Sultana as one usually sees in a second-rate theatre. If Dalton's blue coat and tight nankeen pantaloons—his favourite full-dress costume—did somewhat destroy the "Bosphorean illusion," as Zoe herself called it, still more did Martha's plain black silk and straw bonnet—both types of the strictly useful, without the slightest taint of extraneous ornament.

Purvis and the general, as they brought up the rear, came also in for their meed of surprise—the one, lost under a mass of cloaks, shawls, scarfs, and carpets; and the other moving listlessly along through the crowded rooms, heedless of the mob and the music, and seeming to follow his leader with a kind of fatuous instinct utterly destitute of volition or even of thought. A group so singularly costumed, seen every day dining at the most costly table, ordering whatever was most expensive; the patrons of the band, and the numerous flower-girls, whose bouquets were actually strewed beneath their feet, were sure to attract the notice of the company; a tribute, it must be owned, which invariably contains a strong alloy of all that is ill-natured, sarcastic, and depreciating. Zoe was a European celebrity, known and recognized by every one. The only difficulty was to learn who the new "victim" was, whence he came, and what means he possessed. There are few places where inventive genius more predominates than at Baden, and Dalton was alternately a successful speculator in railroads, a South American adventurer, a slaver, and a Carlist agent; characters for which honest Peter had about as many requisites as he possessed for Hamlet or Cardinal Wolsey. He seemed to have abundance of money, however, and played high—two qualities of no small request in this favoured region. Dalton's gambling tastes were all originally associated with the turf and its followers; a race in his eyes was the legitimate subject of a bet; and if anything else could rival it in interest, it was some piece of personal prowess or skill, some manly game of strength or activity. To men of this stamp the wager is merely a pledge to record the sentiments they entertain upon a particular event. It is not, as gamesters understand it, the whole sum and substance of the interest. Personal pride, the vain-glory of success, is the triumph in one case; in the other, there is no question of anything save gain. To this difference may be traced the wide disparity of feeling exhibited by both in moments of failing fortune. To one, loss comes with all the harassing sensations of defeat; wounded self-esteem and baffled hope giving poignancy to the failure. To the other, it is a pure question of a moneyed forfeiture, unaccompanied with a single thought that can hurt the pride of the player. Hence the wild transports of passion in the one case, and the calm, cold self-possession in the other.

We need scarcely say to which class Dalton belonged; indeed, so far as the public play at Baden was concerned, it was the notoriety that pleased him most. The invariable falling back to make way for him as he came up; the murmur of his name as he passed on; the comments on what he would probably do; and, not least of all, the buzz of admiring astonishment that was sure to arise as he plumped down before him the great canvas bag full of gold, which the banker's porter had just handed him!

All the little courtesies of the croupiers, those little official flatteries which mean so much and so little, were especially reserved for *him;* and the unlucky player, who watched his solitary Napoleon "raked in" by a yawning, listless croupier, became suddenly aware, by the increased alacrity of look around him, that a higher interest was awakened as Peter drew nigh.

The "Count's" chair was ostentatiously placed next the banker's; a store of cards to mark the chances laid before him; the grave croupier—he looked like an archdeacon—passed his gold snuff-box across the table; the smartly-wigged and waistcoated one at his side presented the cards to cut, with some whispered remark that was sure to make Dalton laugh heartily. The sensation of this *entrée* was certain to last some minutes; and even the impatience of the players to resume the game was a tribute that Dalton accepted as complimentary to the bustle of his approach.

In accordance with the popular superstition of the play-table, Dalton's luck was an overmatch for all the skill of more accomplished gamblers; knowing nothing whatever of the game, only aware when he had won or lost, by seeing that his stake had doubled or disappeared, he was an immense winner. Night after night the same fortune attended him, and so unerringly seemed all his calculations made, that the very caprices of his play looked like well-studied and deep combinations. If many of the bystanders were disposed to this opinion, the "bankers" thought otherwise; they knew that, in the end, the hour of retribution must come, and, through all their losses, not only observed every mark of courteous deference towards him, but by many a bland smile, and many a polite gesture, seemed to intimate the pleasure they felt in his good fortune. This was all that was wanting to fill up the measure of Dalton's delight.

"There isn't a bit of envy or bad feeling about them chaps," he would often say; "whether I carry away forty Naps. or four hundred of a night, they're just as civil. Faix! he knew many a born gentleman might take a lesson from them."

So long as he continued to win, Dalton felt comparatively little interest in play, beyond the notice his presence and his large stakes were sure to excite. As a game, it possessed no hold upon him; and when he had changed his heaps of glittering gold for notes, he arose to leave the table, and to forget all that had occurred there as matters of no possible interest to remember.

Such was no longer the case when fortune turned. Then, and for the first time, the gambler's passion awoke in his heart, and the sting of defeat sent its pangs through him. The prying, searching looks of the by-standers, too, were a dreadful ordeal; for all were curious to see how he bore his losses, and Dalton was no accomplished gamester, who could lose with all the impassive gravity of seeming indifference. Still less was he gifted with that philosophy of the play-table, that teaches a timely retreat before adverse fortune; he knew nothing of those sage maxims by which the regular gambler controls his temper and regulates his conduct; nor had he learned the art by which good and sterling qualities, the gifts of noble natures, can be brought into the service of a low and degrading vice! Dalton, it must be owned, was what is called "a bad loser"—that is, he lost his temper with his money; and the more steadily luck seemed against him the more determinedly did he "back his fortune." Now doubling, now trebling his stake, he lost considerable sums, till at last, as the hand of the clock stood within a few minutes of the closing hour, he emptied the remainder of his bag upon the table, and, without counting, set it all upon a card.

"Rouge perd et couleur!" cried the banker, and raked in the glittering heap, and, amid a murmur of half-compassionate astonishment, Peter arose from the table. Mrs. Ricketts and her suite were all in the ball-room, but Dalton only remembered them when he had gained the open air. The terrible shock of his reverse had overwhelmed all his faculties, and almost stunned him to unconsciousness. At last he bethought him of his guests; but it was some time before he could summon sufficient composure of look to go in search of them. He had been so accustomed—to use his own phrase—"to ride the winner," that he didn't know how to face the company as a beaten man. He thought of all the glances of impertinent pity his presence would call forth, and imagined the buzz of remark and comment every line of his features would give rise to. Poor Peter!—little knew he that such signs of sympathy are never given to the very saddest of misfortunes, and that, in such a society, no one wastes a thought upon his neighbour's reverses, except when they serve as a guide to himself.

He did, indeed, overhear from time to time little broken sentences like these: "The old fellow with the white moustache has had a squeeze 'to-night.'" "He caught it heavy and thick." "Must have lost close on a thousand Naps." "Bank walked into him;" and so on—comments as free from any tone of sympathy as the proudest heart could possibly have asked for. But even these were easier to bear than the little playful cajoleries of Mrs. Ricketts on his supposed successes.

Knowing him to be a frequent winner, and hearing from Scroope the large sums he occasionally carried away, she invariably accosted him with some little jesting rebuke on his "dreadful luck"—that "wicked good fortune"—that would follow him in everything and everywhere.

Purvis had been a close spectator of all that went on this unlucky evening, and was actually occupied with his pencil in calculating the losses when Peter entered the room.

"He had above eighteen or twenty bank-notes of a th-thousand francs," cried he, "when he be-be-began the evening. They are all gone now! He played at least a dozen 'rouleaux' of fifty Naps.; and as to the bag, I can m-make no guess how m-m-much it held."

"I'll tell you then, sir," said Peter, good-humouredly, as he just overheard the last remark. "The bag held three hundred and eighty Napoleons; and as you're pretty correct in the other items, you'll not be far from the mark by adding about fifty or sixty Naps. for little bets here and there."

"What coolness, what stoical indifference!" whispered Mrs. Ricketts to Martha, but loud enough for Dalton to hear. "That is so perfectly Irish; they can be as impetuous as the Italian, and possess all the self-restraint and impassive bearing of the Indian warrior."

"But w-w-why did you go on, when luck was a-a-gainst you?"

"Who told me it was against me till I lost all my money?" cried Dalton. "If the first reverse was to make a man feel beat, it would be a very cowardly world, Mr. Purvis."

"Intensely Irish!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts.

"Well, maybe it is," broke in Peter, who was not in a mood to accept anything in a complimentary sense.

"Irish it may be; and as you remarked a minute ago, we're little better than savages——"

"Oh, Mr. Dalton—dear Mr. Dalton!"

"No matter; I'm not angry, ma'am. The newspapers says as bad—ay, worse, every day of the week. But what I'm observing is, that the man that could teach me how to keep my money, could never have taught me how to win it. You know the old proverb about the 'faint heart,' Mr. Purvis?"

"Yes; but I—I—I don't want a f-f-fair lady!"

"Faix! I believe you're right there, my little chap," said Peter, laughing heartily, and at once recovering all his wonted good-humour at the sound of his own mellow-toned mirth; and in this pleasant mood he gave an arm to each of his fair companions, and led them into the supper-room. There was an ostentatious desire for display in the order Dalton gave that evening to the waiter. It seemed as if he wished to appear perfectly indifferent about his losses. The table was covered with a costly profusion that attracted general notice. Wines of the rarest and most precious vintages stood on the sideboard. Dalton did the honours with even more than his accustomed gaiety. There was a stimulant in that place at the head of the table—there was some magical influence in the duty of host that never failed with him. The sense of sway and power that ambitious minds feel in high and pre-eminent stations were all his, as he sat at the top of his board; and it must be owned, that with many faults of manner, and many shortcomings on the score of taste, yet Peter did the honours of his table well and gracefully.

Certain is it Mrs. Rickets and her friends thought so. Zoe was in perfect ecstasies at the readiness of his repartees and the endless variety of his anecdotes. He reminded her at once of Sheridan and "poor dear Mirabeau," and various other "beaux esprits" she used to live with. Martha listened to him with sincere pleasure. Purvis grew very tipsy in the process of his admiration, and the old general, suddenly brought back to life and memory under the influence of champagne, thought him so like Jack Trevor, of the Engineers, that he blubbered out, "I think-I'm listening to Jack. It's poor Trevor over again."

Was it any wonder if in such intoxications Peter forgot all his late reverses, nor ever remembered them till he had wished his company good-night, and found himself alone in his own chamber. Pecuniary difficulties were no new thing to Dalton, and it would not have interfered with his pleasant dreams that night had the question been one of those ordinary demands which he well knew how to resist or evade by many a legal sleight and many an illegal artifice; but here was a debt of honour; he had given his name, three or four times during the evening, for large sums, lost on the very instant they were borrowed! These must be repaid on the next day; but how, he knew not. How he "stood" in Abel Kraus's books he had not the remotest idea. It might be with a balance, or it might be with a deficit. All he really knew was, that he had latterly drawn largely, and spent freely; and, as Abel always smiled and seemed satisfied, Peter concluded that his affairs needed no surer or safer evidences of prosperity. To have examined ledgers and day-books with such palpable proofs of solvency, would have been, in his eyes, an act of as great absurdity as that of a man who would not believe in the sunshine till he had first consulted the thermometer!

"I must see Abel early to-morrow. Abel will set it all right," were the conclusions to which he always came back; and if not very clearly evident how, why, or by what means, still he was quite satisfied that honest Kraus would extricate him from every difficulty. "The devil go with it for black and red," said he, as he lay down in his bed. "I'd have plenty of cash in my pocket for everything this night, if it wasn't for that same table; and an ugly game it is as ever a man played. Shuffle and cut; faites your 'jeu'; thirty-four—thirty-three; red wins —black loses; there's the whole of it; sorrow more on't, except the sad heart that comes afterwards!" These last words he uttered with a deep sigh, and then turned his face to the pillow.

He passed a restless, feverish night; the sleep being more harassing than even his waking moments, disturbed as it was by thoughts of all he had lately gone through. All the tremendous excitement of the play-table, heightened by the effect of wine, made up a wild chaotic confusion in his brain, that was almost madness. He awoke repeatedly, too, eager for daylight, and the time to call upon honest Abel. At these times he would pace his room up and down, framing the speeches by which he meant to open the interview. Kraus was familiar with his usual "pleas." With Ireland and her stereotyped distresses he was thoroughly conversant. Famine, fever, potato-rot, poor-rates, emigration, and eviction were themes he could have almost discussed himself; but all he recognized in them was an urgent demand for money, and an occasion for driving the very hardest of bargains. The Russian remittances had been less regular of late; so at least Abel averred, for Dalton neither knew nor tried to know any details. The dates were frequently inconvenient, and the places of payment oftentimes remote. Still, Abel was civil—nay, almost cordial; and what can any man ask for more than a smile from his banker!

Dalton was quite at ease upon one point; Kraus was sure to know nothing of his late losses at play; in fact, out of his little den wherein he sat he seemed to be aware of nothing in the whole wide world. A small "slip," which arrived each morning from Frankfort, told him the current exchanges of the day. The faces of his clients revealed all the rest. But Dalton was greatly deceived on this point. There was not the slightest incident of Baden with which he was not familiar, nor any occurrence in its life of dissipation on which he was uninformed. His knowledge was not the offspring of any taste for scandal, or any liking for the secret gossiping of society. No; his was a purely practical and professional information. The arch-duke who had lost so heavily at "roulette" would need a loan on the morrow; the count who was about to elope with the marchioness, must have bills on Paris; the colonel who had shot the baron in a duel couldn't escape over the frontier without money. In a word, every vice and iniquity seemed the tributaries of his trade; and whether to consummate their wickedness, or escape its penalty, men must first come to Abel Kraus!

To see him crouching behind his little desk, poring over the scattered fragments of dirty papers, which were his only books, you would never have suspected that he had a thought above the mystic calculations before him. Watch him more narrowly, however, and you will perceive that not a figure can cross the street and approach his door without meeting a shrewd, quick glance from those dark eyes; while a faint muttering sound betrays his detection of the visitor's object.

Long, then, before Dalton swaggered up to the money-changer's den, Abel knew every circumstance of the previous night, and had actually before him on his desk a correct account of all the sums he had lost at play. Abel was not unprepared for such tidings. Dalton was precisely the man to rush headlong into play the moment fortune turned with him, and the pang of defeat was added to the bitterness of a loss; Abel only wondered that the reverse had not come earlier. And so he mumbled below his breath, as with his hat set jauntily on one side, and his hands stuck carelessly beneath his coat-tails, Dalton came forward.

Peter had so far "got up" his air of easy indifference as to whistle a tune, but, somehow, as he drew nearer to the door, the sounds waxed fainter and fainter, and, before he had crossed the threshold, had sunk away into the cadence of a heavy sigh. Abel never looked up as the other entered, but, affecting the deepest preoccupation, went on with his figures.

"Morrow, Abel," said Dalton, as he threw himself into a chair, and, removing his hat, began to wipe his forehead with his handkerchief. "This is a murdering hot day. It's not ten yet, and the sun's roasting!"

"Fine weather for de harvest, Herr von Dalton, but a leetle rain do no harm."

"Faix! I think not—neither to man nor beast!"

Abel grinned at the brawny throat and massive proportions that seemed so unequal to sustain the heat, but said nothing.

"How's the exchange, Abel?" said Peter—"how's the exchange?"

Now, in justice to our worthy friend Dalton, we must own that he put this question without having the very remotest idea of its meaning. An inscription from the tomb of the Pharaohs would have been to the full as intelligible to him as an abstract from the "City Article." He asked it as certain "charming women" inquire about the compass on board ship—something, in fact, suitable to the time and place, and proper to be done on like occasions.

"De exchange is very uncertain; de market is up and down," said Abel, dryly.

"That's bad," said Dalton, gravely—"that's very bad!"

"De Mongolian loan is de reason," rejoined Abel.

Dalton gave a grunt, that might mean assent or displeasure with that view of the case, but did not trust himself with more.

"Dey will not take de scrip at eighty-two, and I tink dey are right."

"Faix! I don't doubt but that they are!" chimed in Peter.

"Dey are right, if all be true we hear of de security. It is de mines of de State dat are hypotheked—how you call it—what you say, 'hypotheked?'"

Dalton was completely puzzled now, and could only scratch his ear—his invariable symptom of utter discomfiture.

"'Tis no matter," cried Abel, with a grating, harsh laugh. "Dey promise, and no pay; and dat is very bad—ha! ha! ha!"

Now Dalton joined in the laugh, but with as ill a grace as needs be.

"Dey promise, and dey no pay, Herr von Dalton!" repeated the Jew, with another laugh, as though he could not tear himself away from so excellent a jest. "Dey borrow, dat dey may make explorations—how you call dem—wit oder men's money. If dey do win, well! if dey lose—bah! dey are bankrupt!"

Now all these allusions were of the most provoking character to poor Dalton, who could not help feeling a very different sympathy for the Mongolians from that expressed by Abel Kraus. "Who knows what difficulties they are in—maybe they'd pay it if they could," muttered he, as he slapped his boot with his cane, and fell into a musing fit.

"Dey shall not have one kreutzer of my moneys; I can tell dem dat!" said Kraus, as he buttoned up the keys of his strong-box, as though suiting the action to his words.

"Don't put up the keys so soon, Abel," said Dalton, with an effort at a laugh. "I want to see the inside of that little iron trunk there."

"You no want money, Herr von Dalton!" exclaimed the other, in amazement. "You no want money! You draw eight hundred florin on Tuesday; you have four hundred on Wednesday evening, and seven rouleaux of Napoleons; on Saturday again I send you twenty thousand franc!"

"All true—every word of it," said Dalton; "but there's no use telling a hungry man about the elegant dinner he ate last week! The short of the matter is, I want cash now."

Kraus appeared to reflect for a few minutes, and then said, "If a leetle sum will do——"

"Faix! it will not. I want five hundred Naps., at the very least."

Kraus threw down his pen, and stared at him without speaking.

"One would think from your face, Abel, that I was asking for a loan of the National Debt. I said five hundred Naps.!"

Abel shook his head mournfully, and merely muttered "Ja! ja!" to himself. "We will look over de account, Herr von Dalton," said he at last; "perhaps I am wrong, I no say, I am sure; but I tink—dat is, I believe—you overdraw very much your credit."

"Well, supposing I did; is it the first time?" said Dalton, angrily. "Ain't I as good a man now as I was before?"

"You are a very goot man, I know well; a very goot and a very pleasant man; but you know de old German proverb, 'Das Gut ist nicht Gelt.'"

"I never heard it till now," muttered Peter, sulkily; "but if a robber in this country put a pistol to your head, he'd be sure to have a proverb to justify him! But to come to the point—can I have the money?"

"I fear very mush—— No!" was the dry response.

"No—is it?" cried Dalton, starting up from his seat; "did you say no?"

Kraus nodded twice, slowly and deliberately.

"Then bad luck to the rap ever you'll see more of *my* money," cried Peter, passionately. "You old Jewish thief, I ought to have known you long ago; fifty, sixty, seventy per cent. I was paying for the use of my own cash, and every bill I gave as good as the bank paper! Ain't you ashamed of yourself, tell me that—ain't you downright ashamed of yourself?"

"I tink not; I have no occasions for shame," said the other, calmly.

"Faix! I believe you there," retorted Dalton. "Your line of life doesn't offer many opportunities of blushing. But if I can't bring you to know shame, maybe I can teach you to feel sorrow. Our dealing is ended from this day out. Peter Dalton doesn't know you more! He never saw you! he never heard of your name! D'ye mind me now? None of your boasting among the English here that you have Mr. Dalton's business. If I hear of your saying it, it's not a contradiction will satisfy me. Understand me well—it's not to leave a mark of friendship that I'll come in here again!"

The fierce tone in which Dalton said these words, and the gesture he made with a tremendous walking-stick, were certainly well calculated to excite Abel's terrors, who, opening a little movable pane of the window, looked out into the street, to assure himself of succour in case of need.

"What's the use of family, rank, or fortune," cried Dalton, indignantly, as he paced up and down the little shop, in a perfect frenzy of passion, "if a little dirty Jew, with a face like a rat-terrier, can insult you? My uncle is one of the first men in Austria, and my daughter's a princess; and there's a creature you wouldn't touch with the tongs has the impudence to—to—to——" Evidently the precise offence did not at once occur to Dalton's memory, for after several efforts to round off his phrase—"to outrage me—to outrage me!" he cried, with the satisfaction of one who had found a missing object.

Meanwhile Abel, who had gradually resumed his courage, was busily engaged in some deep and intricate calculations, frequently referring to a number of ill-scrawled scraps of paper on a file before him, not heeding, if he heard, the storm around him.

"Dere, saar," said he at length, as he pushed a slip of paper towards Dalton—"Dere, saar; our affairs is closed, as you say. Dere is your debit—eighteen hundred and seventy-three florins, 'convenzion money.' Dere may be leetle charges to be added for commissions and oder tings; but dat is de chief sum which you pay, now."

There was a sharp emphasis on the last monosyllable that made Dalton start.

"I'll look over it; I'll compare it with my books at home," said he, haughtily, as he stuffed the slip of paper into his waistcoat-pocket.

"Den, you no pay to-day?" asked Abel.

"Nor to-morrow, nor the day after, nor, maybe, a while longer," said Dalton, with a composure he well knew how to feel in like circumstances.

"Very well, den; I will have securities. I will have bail for my moneys before tree o'clock this day. Dere is de sommation before de Tribunal, Herr von Dalton." And he handed a printed document, stamped with the official seal of a law court, across the table. "You will see," added the Jew, with a malicious grin, "dat I was not unprepared for all dis. Abel Kraus is only an old Jew, but he no let de Gentile cheat him!"

Dalton was stunned by the suddenness of this attack. The coolly-planned game of the other so overmatched all the passionate outbreak of his own temper, that he felt himself mastered at once by his wily antagonist.

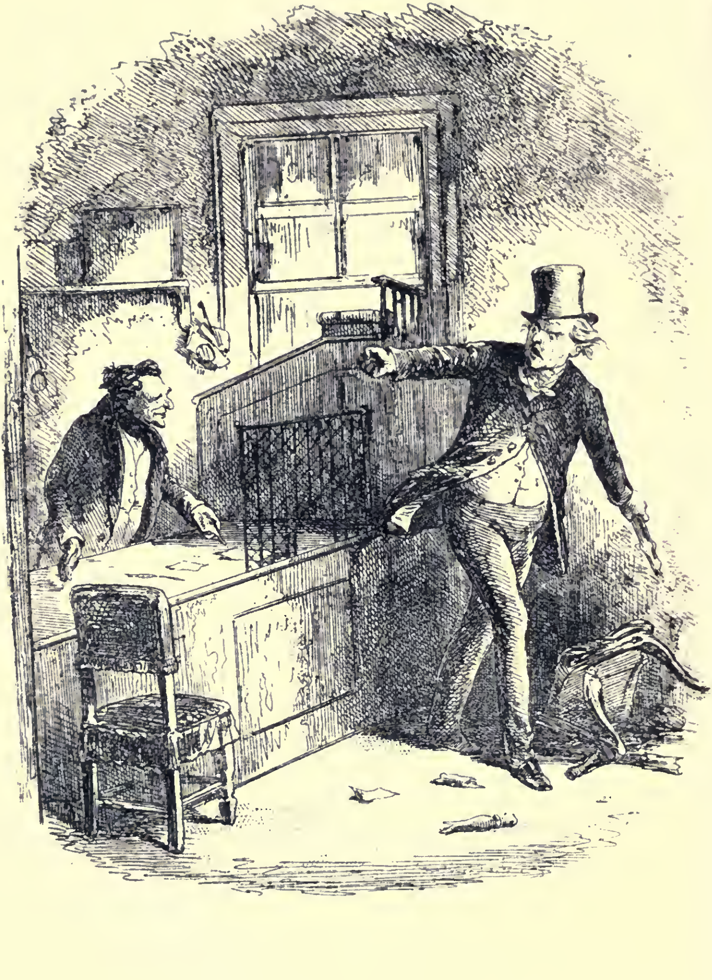
"To the devil I fling your summons!" cried he, savagely. "I can't even read it."

"Your avocat will explain it all. He will tell you dat if you no pay de moneys herein charged, nor give a goot and sufficient surety dereof before de Civil Gericht, dis day, dat you will be consign to de prison of de State at Carlsruhe, dere to remain your 'leben lang,' if so be you never pay."

"Arrest me for debt the day it's demanded!" cried Dalton, whose notions of the law's delay were not a little shocked by such peremptory proceedings.

"It is in criminal as well as in civil Gericht to draw on a banker beyond your moneys, and no pay, on demand."

"There's justice for you!" cried Dalton, passionately. "Highway robbery, housebreaking, is decenter. There's some courage, at least, in *them!* But I wouldn't believe



Abel narrowly escapes caning.

you if you were on your oath. There isn't such a law in Europe, nor in the East 'Ingies!'"

Abel grinned, but never uttered a word.

"So, any ould thief, then, can trump up a charge against a man—can send him off to gaol—before he can look around him!"

"If he do make false charge, he can be condem to de galleys," was the calm reply.

"And what's the use of that?" cried Dalton, in a transport of rage. "Isn't the galleys as good a life as sitting there? Isn't it as manly a thing to strain at an oar as to sweat a guinea?"

"I am a burgher of the Grand Duchy," said Abel, boldly, "and if you defame me, it shall be before witnesses!" And as he spoke he threw wide the window, so that the passers-by might hear what took place.

Dalton's face became purple; the veins in his forehead swelled like a thick cordage, and he seemed almost bursting with suppressed passion. For an instant it was even doubtful if he could master his struggling wrath. At last he grasped the heavy chair he had been sitting on, and, dashing it down on the ground, broke it into atoms; and then, with an execration in Irish, the very sound of which rang like a curse, he strode out of the shop, and hastened down the street.

Many a group of merry children, many a morning excursionist returning from his donkey-ride, remarked the large old man, who, muttering and gesticulating, as he went, strode along the causeway, not heeding nor noticing those around him. Others made way for him as for one it were not safe to obstruct, and none ventured a word as he passed by. On he went, careless of the burning heat and the hot rays of the sun—against which already many a jalousie was closed, and many an awning spread—up the main street of the town, across the "Platz," and then took his way up one of the steep and narrow lanes which led towards the upper town. To see him, nothing could look more purpose-like than his pace and the manner of his going; and yet he knew nothing of where he walked nor whither the path led him. A kind of instinct directed his steps into an old and oft-followed track, but his thoughts were bent on other objects. He neither saw the half-terrified glances that were turned on him, nor marked how they who were washing at the fountain ceased their work, as he passed, to stare at him.

At last he reached the upper town; emerging from which by a steep flight of narrow stone steps, he gained a little terraced spot of ground, crossed by two rows of linden-trees, under whose shade he had often sat of an evening to watch the sunset over the plain. He did not halt here, but passing across the grassy sward, made for a small low house which stood at the angle of the terrace. The shutters of the shop-window were closed, but a low half-door permitted a view of the interior; leaning over which Dalton remained for several minutes, as if lost in deep reverie.

The silent loneliness of the little shop at first appeared to engross all his attention, but after a while other thoughts came slowly flittering through his muddy faculties, and with a deep-drawn sigh he said,—

"Dear me! but I thought we were living here still! It's droll enough how one can forget himself! Hans, Hans Roëckle, my man!" cried he, beating with his stick against the doors as he called out. "Hanserl! Hans, I say! Well, it's a fine way to keep a shop! How does the creature know but I'm a lady that would buy half the gimcracks in the place, and he's not to be found! That's what makes these devils so poor—they never mind their business. 'Tis nothing but fun and diversion they think of the whole day long. There's no teaching them that there's nothing like indhustry! What makes us the finest people under the sun? Work—nothing but work! I'm sure I'm tired of telling him so! Hans, are you asleep, Hans Roëckle?" No answer followed this summons, and now Dalton, after some vain efforts to unbolt the door, strode over it into the shop. "Faix! I don't wonder that you hadn't a lively business," said he, as he looked around at the half-stocked shelves, over which dust and cob-webs were spread like a veil. "Sorrow a thing I don't know as well as I do my gaiters! There's the same soldiers, and that's the woodcutter with the matches on his back, and there's the little cart Frank mended for him! Poor Frank, where is he now, I wonder?" Dalton sighed heavily as he continued to run his eye over the various articles all familiar to him long ago. "What's become of Hans?" cried he at last, aloud; "if it wasn't an honest place he wouldn't have a stick left! To go away and leave everything at sixes and sevens —well, well, it's wonderful!"

Dalton ascended the stairs—every step of which was well known to him—to the upper story where he used to live. The door was unfastened, and the rooms were just as he had left them—even to the little table at which Nelly used to sit beside the window. Nothing was changed; a bouquet of faded flowers—the last, perhaps, she had ever plucked in that garden—stood in a glass in the window-sill; and so like was all to the well-remembered past, that Dalton almost thought he heard her footstep on the floor.

"Well, it was a nice little quiet spot, any way!" said he, as he sank into a chair, and a heavy tear stole slowly along his cheek. "Maybe it would have been well for me if I never left it! With all our poverty we spent many a pleasant night beside that hearth, and many's the happy day we passed in that wood there. To be sure, we were all together, then! that makes a difference! instead of one here, another there, God knows when to meet, if ever!

"I used to fret many a time about our being so poor, but I was wrong after all, for we divided our troubles amongst us, and that left a small share for each; but there's Nelly now, pining away—I don't know for what, but I see it plain enough; and here am I myself with a heavy heart this day; and sure, who can tell if Kate, great as she is, hasn't her sorrows; and poor Frank, 'tis many a hard thing, perhaps, he has to bear. I believe in reality we were better then!"

He arose, and walked about the room; now stopping before each well-remembered object; now shaking his head in mournful acquiescence with some unspoken regret; he went in turn through each chamber, and then, passing from the room that had been Nelly's, he descended a little zig-zag, rickety stair, by which Hans had contrived to avoid injuring the gnarled branches of a fig-tree that grew beneath. Dalton now found himself in the garden; but how unlike what it had been! Once, the perfection of blooming richness and taste—the beds without a weed, the gravel trimly raked and shining, bright channels of limpid water running amid the flowers, and beautiful birds of gay plumage caged beneath the shady shrubs—now, all was overrun with rank grass and tall weeds; the fountains were dried up, the flowers trodden down—even the stately yew hedge, the massive growth of a century, was broken by the depredations of the mountain cattle. All was waste, neglect, and desolation.

"I'd not know the place—it is not like itself," muttered Dalton, sorrowfully. "I never saw the like of this before. There's the elegant fine plants dying for want of care! and the rose-trees rotting just for want of a little water! To think of how he laboured late and early here, and to see it now! He used to call them carnations his children: there was one Agnes, and there was another Undine—indeed, I believe that was a lily; and I think there was a Nelly, too; droll enough to make out they were Christians! but sure, they did as well; and he watched after them as close! and ay, and stranger than all, he'd sit and talk to them for hours. It's a *quare* world altogether; but maybe it's our own fault that it's not better; and perhaps we ought to give in more to each other's notions, and not sneer at whims and fancies when they don't please ourselves."

It was while thus ruminating, Dalton entered a little arbour, whose trellised walls and roofs had been one of the triumphs of Hanserl's skill. Ruin, however, had now fallen on it, and the drooping branches and straggling tendrils hung mournfully down on all sides, covering the stone table, and even the floor, with their vegetation. As Dalton stood, sad and sorrow-struck at this desolation, he perceived the figure of Hans himself, as, half-hidden by the leaves, he sat in his accustomed seat. His head was uncovered, but his hair fell in great masses on either side, and with his long beard, now neglected and untrimmed, gave him an unusually wild and savage look. A book lay open on his knees, but his hands were crossed over it, and his eyes were upturned as if in reverie.

Dalton felt half ashamed at accosting him; there was something ungracious in the way he had quitted the poor dwarf's dwelling; there had been a degree of estrangement for weeks before between them, and altogether he knew that he had ill-requited all the unselfish kindness of the little toy-seller; so that he would gladly have retired without being noticed, when Hans suddenly turned and saw him.

It was almost with a cry of surprise Hans called out his name.

"This is kind of you, Herr von Dalton. Is the Fraulein——" He stopped and looked eagerly around.

"No, Hanserl," said Dalton, answering to the half-expressed question, "Nelly isn't with me; I came up alone. Indeed, to tell the truth, I found myself here without well knowing why or how. Old habit, I suppose, led me, for I was thinking of something else."

"They were kind thoughts that guided your steps," said the dwarf, in accents of deep gratitude, "for I have been lonely of late."

"Why don't you come down and see us, Hanserl? It's not so far off, and you know Nelly is always glad to see you."

"It is true," said the dwarf, mournfully.

"You were always a good friend to us, Hanserl," said Dalton, taking the other's hand and pressing it cordially; "and faix! as the world goes," added he, sighing, "there's many a thing easier found than a friend."

"The rich can have all—even friendship," muttered Hans, lowly.

"I don't know that, Hans; I'm not so sure you're right there."

"They buy it," said the dwarf, with a fierce energy, "as they can buy everything: the pearl for which the diver hazards life—the gem that the polisher has grown blind over—the fur for which the hunter has shed his heart's blood. And yet when they've got them they have not got content."

"Ay, that's true," sighed Dalton. "I suppose nobody is satisfied in this world."

"But they can be if they will but look upward," cried Hans, enthusiastically; "if they will learn to think humbly of themselves, and on how slight a claim they possess all the blessings of their lot; if they will but bethink them that the sun and the flowers, the ever-rolling sea, and the leafy forest, are all their inheritance—that for them, as for all, the organ peals through the dim-vaulted aisle with promises of eternal happiness—and lastly, that, with all the wild contentions of men's passions, there is ever gushing up in the human heart a well of kind and affectionate thoughts—like those springs we read of, of pure water amid the salt ocean, and which, taken at the source, are sweet and good to drink from. Men are not so bad by nature; it is the prizes for which they struggle, the goals they strive for, corrupt them! Make of this fair earth a gaming-table, and you will have all the base passions of the gamester around it."

"Bad luck to it for gambling," said Dalton, whose intelligence was just able to grasp at the illustration; "I wish I'd never seen a card; and that reminds me, Hans, that maybe you'd give me a bit of advice. There was a run against me last night in that thieving place. The 'red' came up fourteen times, and I, backing against it every time, sometimes ten, sometimes twenty—ay, faix! as high as fifty 'Naps.' You may think what a squeeze I got! And when I went to old Kraus this morning, this is what he sticks in my hand instead of a roll of bank-notes." With these words Dalton presented to Hans the printed summons of the "Tribunal."

"A Gerichts-Ruf!" said Hans, with a voice of deep reverence, for he entertained a most German terror for the law and its authority. "This is a serious affair."

"I suppose it is," sighed Dalton; "but I hope we're in a Christian country, where the law is open?"

Hans nodded, and Peter went on,—

"What I mean is, that nothing can be done in a hurry—that when we have a man on our side, he can oppose and obstruct, and give delays, picking a hole here and finding a flaw there; asking for vouchers for this and proofs for that, and then waiting for witnesses that never come, and looking for papers that never existed; making Chancery of it, Hans, my boy—making Chancery of it."

"Not here—not with us!" said Hans, gravely. "You must answer to this charge to-day, and before four o'clock too, or to-morrow there will be writ of 'contumacy' against you. You haven't got the money?"

"Of course I haven't, nor a ten-pound note towards it."

"Then you must provide security."

"'Tis easy said, my little man, but it is not so easy dealing with human beings as with the little wooden figures in your shop beyond."

"There must be 'good and substantial bail,' as the summons declares; such as will satisfy the Court," said Hans, who seemed at once to have become a man of acute worldly perception at sight of this printed document.

"Security—bail!" exclaimed Dalton. "You might as well ask Robinson Crusoe who'd be godfather to his child on the desert island. There's not a man, woman, or child in the place would give me a meal's meat. There's not a house I could shelter my head in for one night; and see now," cried he, carried away by an impulse of passionate excitement, "it isn't by way of disparagement I say it to this little town—for the world all over is the same—the more you give the less you get! Treat them with champagne and venison; send money to this one, make presents to that, and the day luck turns with you, the best word they'll have for you is, 'He was a wasteful, careless devil—couldn't keep it when he had it—lived always above his means—all hand and mouth.' It's a kind friend that will vouchsafe as much as 'Poor fellow—I'm sorry for him!'"

"And to what end is wealth," cried Hans, boldly, "if it but conduce to this? Are the friends well chosen who can behave thus? Are the hospitalities well bestowed that meet such return? or is it not rather selfishness is paid back in the same base coin that it uttered?"

"For the matter of that," said Dalton, angrily, "I never found that vulgar people was a bit more grateful than their betters, nor low manners any warranty for high principles; and when one is to be shipwrecked, it's better to go down in a 'seventy-four' than be drowned out of a punt in a mill-pond."

"It's past noon already," said Hans, pointing to the sun-dial on his house. "There's little time to be lost."

"And as little to be gained," muttered Dalton, moodily, as he strolled out into the garden.

"Let me have this paper," said Hans; "I will see the Herr Kraus myself, and try if something cannot be done. With time, I suppose, you could meet this claim?"

"To be sure I could, when my remittances arrive—when my instalments are paid up—when my rents come in—when——" He was about to add, "when luck changes," but he stopped himself just in time.

"There need be no difficulty if you can be certain," said Hans, slowly.

"Certain!—and of what is a man certain in this life?" said Dalton, in his tone of moralizing. "Wasn't I certain of the Corrig-O'Neal estate? Wasn't I certain of Miles Dalton's property in the funds? Wasn't I certain that if the Parliament wasn't taken away from us, that I'd have my own price for the borough of Knocknascanelera?—and sorrow one of the three ever came to me. Ay, no later than last night, wasn't I certain that black would come up——"

"When I said certain," broke in Hans, "I meant so far as human foresight could pledge itself; but I did not speak of the chances of the play-table. If your expectations of payment rest on these, do not talk of them as certainties."

"What's my estates for? Where's my landed property?" cried Dalton, indignantly. "To hear you talk, one would think I was a chevalier of indhustry, as they call them."

"I ask your pardon, Herr," said Hans, humbly. "It is in no spirit of idle curiosity that I speak; less still, with any wish to offend you. I will now see what is best to do. You may leave all in my hands, and by four o'clock, or five at furthest, you shall hear from me."

"That's sensible—that's friendly," cried Dalton, shaking the other's hand warmly, and really feeling the most sincere gratitude for the kindness.

If there was any act of friendship he particularly prized, it was the intervention that should relieve him of the anxiety and trouble of a difficult negotiation, and leave him, thoughtless and careless, to stroll about, neither thinking of the present nor uneasy for the future. The moment such an office had devolved upon another, Dalton felt relieved of all sense of responsibility before his own conscience; and, although the question at issue were his own welfare or ruin, he ceased to think of it as a personal matter. Like his countryman, who consoled himself when the house was in flames by thinking "he was only a lodger," he actually forgot his own share of peril by reflecting on the other interests that were at stake. And the same theory that taught him to leave his soul to his priest's care, and his health to his doctor's, made him quite satisfied when a friend had charge of his honour or his fortune.

It was as comfortable a kind of fatalism as need be; and, assuredly, to have seen Peter's face as he now descended the steps to the lower town, it would be rash to deny that he was not a sincere believer in his philosophy. No longer absent in air and clouded in look, he had a smile and a pleasant word for all who passed him; and now, with a jest for this one, and a kreutzer for that, he held on his way, with a tail of beggars and children after him, all attracted by that singular mesmerism which draws around certain men everything that is vagrant and idle—from the cripple at the crossing to the half-starved cur-dog without an owner.

This gift was, indeed, his; and whatever was penniless, and friendless, and houseless seemed to feel they had a claim on Peter Dalton.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST STAKE OF ALL.

Dalton found his little household on the alert at his return home, for Mrs. Ricketts had just received an express to inform her that her "two dearest friends on earth" were to arrive that evening in Baden, and she was busily engaged in arranging a little fête for their reception. All that poor Nelly knew of the expected guests was, that one was a distinguished soldier, and the other a no less illustrious diplomatist; claims which, for the reader's illumination, we beg to remark were embodied in the persons of Colonel Haggerstone and Mr. Foglass. Most persons in Mrs. Ricketts's position would have entertained some scruples about introducing a reinforcement to the already strong garrison of the villa, and would have been disposed to the more humble but safe policy enshrined in the adage of "letting well alone." But she had a spirit far above such small ambitions, and saw that the Dalton hospitalities were capable of what, in parliamentary phrase, is called a "most extended application."

By the awe-struck air of Nelly, and the overweening delight manifested by her father, Zoe perceived the imposing effect of great names upon both, and so successfully did she mystify the description of her two coming friends, that an uninterested listener might readily have set them down for the Duke and Prince Metternich, unless, indeed, that the praises she lavished on them would have seemed even excessive for such greatness. A triumphal arch was erected half-way up the avenue, over which, in flowery initials, were to be seen the letters "B." and "P.," symbols to represent "Bayard" and "Puffendorf;" under which guise Haggerstone and the Consul were to be represented. Strings of coloured lamps were to be festooned along the approach, over which an Irish harp was to be exhibited in a transparency, with the very original inscription of "Caed Mille failtha," in Celtic letters beneath.

The banquet—the word dinner was strictly proscribed for that day—was to be arrayed in the hall, where Dalton was to preside, if possible, with an Irish crown upon his head, supported by Nelly as the genius of Irish music; and Zoe herself in a composite character—half empress, half prophetess—a something between Sappho and the Queen of Sheba; Martha, for the convenience of her various household cares, was to be costumed as a Tyrolese hostess; and Purvis, in a dress of flesh-coloured web, was to represent Mercury, sent on purpose from above to deliver a message of welcome to the arriving guests. As for the general, there was a great doubt whether he ought to be Belisarius or Suwarrow, for, being nearly as blind as the one and as deaf as the other, his qualifications were about evenly balanced.

If not insensible to some of the absurdities of this notable project, Dalton got the ridicule in the pleasanter occupation of the bustle, the movement, and the tumult it occasioned. It did his heart good to see the lavish waste and profusion that went forward. The kitchen-table, as it lay spread with fruit, fish, and game, might have made a study for Schneiders; and honest Peter's face glowed with delight as he surveyed a scene so suggestive of convivial thoughts and dissipation.

"No doubt of it, Nelly," said he, "but Mother Ricketts has grand notions! She does the thing like a princess!" The praise was so far well bestowed, that there was something royal in dispensing hospitality without regarding the cost; while, at the same time, she never entertained the slightest sentiment of esteem for those in whose favour it was to be exercised. Among the very few things she feared in this world was Haggerstone's "tongue," which she herself averred was best conciliated by giving "occupation to his teeth." The banquet was "got up" with that object, while it also gave a favourable opportunity of assuming that unbounded sway in Dalton's household which should set the question of her supremacy at rest for ever.

To this end was poor Martha engaged with puff-paste, and jellies, and whip cream, with wreaths of roses and pyramids of fruit, from dawn till dusk. To this end was Purvis nearly driven out of his mind by endeavouring to get off by heart an address in rhyme, the very first line of which almost carried him off in a fit of coughing—the word Puffendorf being found nearly as unmanageable to voice as it was unsuited to verse. While poor Belisarius, stripped of rule and compass, denied access to water-colours, Indian-ink, or charcoal, spent a most woful day of weary expectancy.

It was, indeed, an awful scene of trouble, fatigue, and exertion on every side, adding one more to those million instances where the preparation for the guest has no possible relation to the degree of esteem he is held in. For so is it in the world: our best receptions are decreed to those we care least for; "our friend" is condemned to the family dinner, while we lavish our fortune on mere acquaintances. In these days the fatted calf would not have been killed to commemorate the return of the prodigal, but have been melted down into mock-turtle, to feast "my lord" or "your grace."

The day wore on, and as the arrangements drew nearer to completion, the anxieties were turned towards the guests themselves, who were to have arrived at five o'clock. It was now six, and yet no sign of their coming! Fully a dozen times had Mrs. Ricketts called Martha from some household cares by the adjuration, "Sister Anne, sister Anne, seest thou nobody coming?" Mercury had twice ventured out on the high road, from which he was driven back by a posse of hooting and laughing children; and Dalton himself paced up and down the terrace in a state of nervous impatience, not a little stimulated by hunger and certain flying visits he paid to the iced punch, to see if it was keeping cool.

There is, assuredly, little mesmeric relation between the expecting host and the lingering guest, or we should not witness all that we do of our friends' unpunctuality in this life. What a want of sympathy between the feverish impatience of the one and the careless dalliance of the other! Not that we intend this censure to apply to the case before us, for Haggerstone had not the very remotest conception of the honours that awaited him, and jogged along his dusty road with no greater desire to be at the end of the journey than was fairly justifiable in one who travelled with German post-horses and Foglass for a companion!

Six o'clock came, and, after another hour of fretful anxiety, it struck seven. By this time beef had become carbon, and fowls were like specimens of lava; the fish was reduced to the state of a "purée," while everything meant to assume the flinty resistance of ice was calmly settling down into a fluid existence. Many an architectural device of poor Martha's genius was doomed to the fate of her other "castles," and towers and minarets of skilful shape dropped off one by one, like the hopes of her childhood. All the telegraphic announcements from the kitchen were of disasters, but Mrs. Ricketts received the tidings with a Napoleonic calmness; and it was only when warned by the gathering darkness over Dalton's brow that she thought it wiser to "give in."

Dalton's ill-humour had, however, a different source from that which she suspected. It proceeded from the quiet but steady importunity with which little Hans paced up and down before the door, now appearing before one window, now before another, totally insensible to the cold discouragement of Dalton's looks, and evidently bent on paying no attention to all the signs and signals intended for his guidance.

"Doesn't he see we've company in the house? Hasn't the little creature the sense to know that this is no time to be bothering and teasing about money? Has he no decency? Has he no respect for his superiors?" Such were the deep mutterings with which Dalton tried to "blow off the steam" of his indignation, while with many a gesture and motion he intimated his anger and impatience. "Faix! he's like a bailiff out there," cried he at last, as he issued forth to meet him. Whatever might have been the first angry impulses of his heart, his second thoughts were far more gentle and well disposed as he drew near to Hanserl, who stood cap in hand, in an attitude of deep and respectful attention.

"They have accepted the bail, Herr von Dalton, and this bond needs but your signature," said Hans, mildly, as he held forth a paper towards him.

"Who's the bail? Give me the bond," said Dalton, rapidly; and not waiting for the answer to his question, "where's the name to be, Hanserl?"

"Here, in the space," said the dwarf, dryly.

"That's soon done, if there's no more wanting," rejoined Peter, with a laugh. "'Tis seldom that writing the same two words cost me so little! Won't you step in a minute, into the house? I'd ask you to stop and eat your dinner, but I know you don't like strangers, and we have company to-day. Well, well, no offence—another time, maybe, when we're alone. He's as proud as the devil, that little chap," muttered he, as he turned back within the house; "I never saw one of his kind that wasn't. 'Tis only creatures with humpbacks and bent shins that never believes they can be wrong in this world; they have a conceit in themselves that's wonderful! Not that there isn't good in him, too—he's a friendly soul as ever I seen! There it is, now. Peter Dalton's hand and deed;" and he surveyed the superscription with considerable satisfaction. "There it is, Hans, and much good may it do you!" said he, as he delivered the document with an air of a prince conferring a favour on a subject.

"You will bear in mind that Abel Kraus is a hard creditor!" said Hans, who could not help feeling shocked at the easy indifference Dalton exhibited.

"Well, but haven't we settled with him?" cried Peter, half impatiently.

"So far as surety for his claim goes——"

"Yes, that's what I mean—he's sure of his money—that's all he wants. I'd be the well-off man to-day if *I* was sure of getting back all ever I lent! But nobody does, and, what's more, nobody expects it."

"This bond expires in twelve days," added Hans, more than commonly anxious to suggest some prudential thoughts.

"Twelve days!" exclaimed Peter, who, instead of feeling alarmed at the shortness of the period, regarded it as so many centuries. "Many's the change one sees in the world in twelve days. Wouldn't you take something—a glass of Marcobrunner, or a little plain Nantz?"

Hans made no reply, for, with bent-down head and hands crossed on his bosom, he was deep in thought.

"I'm saying, that maybe you'd drink a glass of wine, Hans?" repeated Dalton; but still no answer came. "What dreamy creatures them Germans are," muttered Peter.

"And then," exclaimed Hanserl, as if speaking to himself, "it is but beginning life anew. Good-bye—farewell." And so saying, he touched his cap courteously, and moved hastily away, while Dalton continued to look after him with compassionate sorrow, for one so little capable of directing his path in life. As he re-entered the house, he found Mrs. Ricketts, abandoning all hopes of her distinguished guests, had just ordered the dinner; and honest Peter consoled himself for their absence by observing that they should be twice as jolly by themselves! Had it depended on himself alone, the sentiment might have had some foundation, for there was something of almost wild gaiety in his manner. All the vicissitudes of the morning, the painful alternations of hope and fear,—hope, so faint as to be a torture, and fear, so dark as to be almost despair—had worked him up to a state of extreme excitement.

To add to this, he drank deeply, quaffing off whole goblets of wine, and seeming to exult in the mad whirlwind of his own reckless jollity. If the jests he uttered on Scroope's costume, or the other allegorical fancies of Zoe's brain, were not of the most refined taste, they were at least heartily applauded by the indulgent public around his board. Mrs. Ricketts was in perfect ecstasies at the flashes of his "Irish wit;" and even Martha, fain to take on credit what was so worthily endorsed, laughed her own meek laugh of approval. As for Purvis, champagne completed what nature had but begun, and he became perfectly unintelligible ere dinner was over.

All this while poor Nelly's sufferings were extreme; she saw the unblushing, shameless adulation of the parasites, and she saw, too, the more than commonly excited glare in her father's eyes—the wildness of fever rather than the passing excitation of wine. In vain her imploring, beseeching glances were turned towards him; in vain she sought by all her little devices, to withdraw him from the scene of riotous debauch, or recall him from the excesses of a revel which was an orgie. In his wild and boastful vein he raved about "home," as he still called it, and of his family possessions—at times vaunting of his wealth and greatness, and then, as suddenly breaking into mad invectives against the Jews and money-lenders, to whom his necessities had reduced him.

"A good run of luck over there!" cried he, frantically, and pointing to the blaze of lamps which now sparkled through the trees before the Cursaal. "One good night yonder, and Peter Dalton would defy the world. If you're a lucky hand, Miss Martha, come over and bet for me. I'll make the bank jump for it before I go to bed! I know the secret of it, now. It's changing from colour to colour ruins everybody. You must be steady to one—black or red, whichever it is; stick fast to it. You lose two, three, maybe six or seven times running; never mind, go on still. 'Tis the same with play as with women, as the old song says,—

'If they're coy and won't hear when you say you adore,
Just squeeze them the tighter and press them the more.'

Isn't that it, Mrs. Ricketts? Ah, baithershin! you never knew that song. Miss Martha's blushing; and just for that I'll back 'red' all the evening; and there's the music beginning already. Here's success to us all! and, faix! it's a pleasant way to deserve it."

Nelly drew near him as they were leaving the room, and, passing her arm fondly about him, whispered a few words in his ear.

"And why not this evening?" said he, aloud, and in a rude voice. "Is it Friday, that it ought to bring bad luck? Why shouldn't I go this evening. I can't hear you; speak louder. Ha! ha! ha! Listen to that, Miss Martha. There's the sensible Nelly for you! She says she had a dhrame about me last night."

"No, dearest papa; but that it was like a dream to me. All the narrative seemed so natural—all the events followed so regularly, and yet I was awake just as I am now."

"More shame for you, then. We can't help ourselves what nonsense we think in our sleep."

"But you'll not go, dearest papa. You'll indulge me for this once, and I'll promise never to tease you by such follies again."

"Faix! I'll go, sure enough; and, what's more, I'll win five thousand pounds this night, as sure as my name's Peter. I saw a black cat shaving himself before a new tin saucepan; and if that isn't luck, I'd like to know what is. A black cat won the Curragh Stakes for Tom Molly; and it was an egg saucepan made Dr. Groves gain the twenty thousand pounds in the lottery. And so, now, may I never leave this room if I'd take two thousand pounds down for my chances to-night!"

And in all the force of this confidence in fortune, Dalton sallied forth to the Cursaal. The rooms were more than usually crowded, and it was with difficulty that, with Mrs. Ricketts on one arm and Martha on the other, he could force his way to the tables. Once there, however, a courteous reception awaited him, and the urbane croupier moved his own august chair to make room for the honoured guest. Although the company was very numerous, the play was as yet but trifling; a stray gold piece here or there glittered on the board, and in the careless languor of the bankers, and the unexcited looks of the bystanders, might be read the fact that none of the well-known frequenters of the place were betting. Dalton's appearance immediately created a sensation of curiosity. Several of those present had witnessed his losses on the preceding night, and were eager to see what course he would now pursue. It was remarked that he was not accompanied, as heretofore, by that formidable money-bag which, with ostentatious noise, he used to fling down on the table before him. Nor did he now produce that worn old leather pocket-book, whose bursting clasp could scarce contain the roll of bank-notes within it. He sat with his hands crossed before him, staring at the table, but to all seeming not noticing the game. At length, suddenly rousing himself, he leant over and said a few words, in a whisper, to the croupier, who, in an equally low tone, communicated with his colleague across the table. A nod and a smile gave the quiet reply, and Dalton, taking a piece of paper, scrawled a few figures on it with a pencil, and with a motion so rapid as to be unseen by many of the bystanders, the banker pushed several "rouleaux" of gold before Dalton, and went on with the game.

Dalton broke one of the envelopes, and as the glittering pieces fell out, he moved his fingers through them, as though their very touch was pleasure. At last, with a kind of nervous impatience, he gathered up a handful, and without counting, threw them on the table.

"How much?" said the croupier.

"The whole of it!" cried Dalton; and scarcely had he spoken, when he won.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the room as he suffered the double stake to remain on the board; which speedily grew into a louder hum of voices, as the banker proceeded to count out the gains of a second victory. Affecting an insight into the game and its chances which he did not possess, Dalton now hesitated and pondered over his bets, increasing his stake, at one moment, diminishing it at another, and assuming all the practised airs of old and tried gamblers. As though in obedience to every caprice, the fortune of the game followed him unerringly. If he lost, it was some mere trifle; when he won, the stake was sure to be a large one. At length even this affected prudence—this mock skill—became too slow for him, and he launched out into all his accustomed recklessness. Not waiting to take in his winnings, he threw fresh handfuls of gold amongst them, till the bank, trembling for its safety, more than once had to reduce the stakes he wished to venture.

"They'd give him five hundred Naps. this moment if he'd cease to play," said some one behind Dalton's chair. "There's nothing the bank dreads so much as a man with courage to back his luck."

"I'd wish them a good night," said another, "if I'd have made so good a thing of it as that old fellow; he has won some thousand Napoleons, I'm certain."

"*He* knows better than that," said the former. "This is a 'run' with him, and he feels it is. He'll 'break' them before the night's over."

Dalton heard every word of this colloquy, and drank in the surmise as greedily as did Macbeth the Witches' prophecy.

"He deserves to win, too," resumed the last speaker, "for I never saw a man play more boldly."

"So much for boldness," cried the other; "he has just risked a fifth time on the red and lost. See, if it be not two hundred 'Naps.'"

The defeat did not dishearten him, for again Dalton covered the board with gold. As if that moment had been the turning point of his destiny, his losses now began, and with all the rapidity of his previous gains. At first he bore the reverse calmly and patiently; after a while a slight gesture of impatience, a half-muttered exclamation would escape him; but when loss followed loss unceasingly, and one immense stake disappeared after another, Dalton's fingers trembled, and his cheeks shook like one in ague. His straining bloodshot eyes were fixed on the play with the intensity of passion, and a convulsive shudder would shake his massive frame at each new tidings of loss. "Am I never to have luck again? Is it only to lead me on that I won? Can this go on for ever?" were the low-muttered words which now he syllabled with difficulty, for already his utterance was thick, and his swollen tongue and flattened cheeks seemed threatened with paralysis.

His last stake was swept away before him, and Dalton, unable to speak, stretched forth his arms across the table to arrest the banker's hand. "A hundred 'Naps.' on the red," cried he, wildly; "no—two hundred—neck or nothing, I'll go five—d'ye hear me?—five hundred on the red!"

A short conversation in whispers ensued between the croupiers, after which one of them spoke a few words to Dalton in a low voice.

"You never said so when I was losing," cried Peter, savagely. "I heard nothing about the rules of the tables *then*."

"The stake is above our limit, sir; above the limit laid down by law," said the chief banker, mildly.

"I don't care for your laws. I lost my money, and I'll have my revenge."

"You can make half de stakes in my name, saar," said a long moustached and not over clean-looking personage beside Dalton's chair.

"That will do—thank you," cried Dalton. "Bet two hundred and fifty for me and I'll stake the rest."

A moment more, and the low voice of the croupier proclaimed that red had lost!

"What does he say—why won't he speak plainly?" cried Dalton, in a voice of passionate energy.

"You lose de stake," muttered the man behind him.

"Of course I do; what other luck could I have? Lose—lose—lose!" said he to himself, in a low, moaning voice. "There they go—the fools!—betting away as fresh as ever. Why won't they take warning by *me?* beggared, ruined as it has left me. May I never! if the red isn't winning every time now!" And, as he spoke, his eyes followed a great heap of gold which some fortunate gambler just drew in before him. "How much did he win, then?" cried Dalton; but none replied to a question so contrary to every etiquette of the table.

"He never counts it," muttered Peter, as he continued to gaze on the lucky player with a kind of envious admiration. 'They say it's best not to count one's winnings. I don't know what's best; I believe 'tis only the devil knows—for it was *he* invented the game.—Red, again, the winner!"

"Why you no back de red?" whispered the man behind his chair.

Dalton started, and was about to give an angry reply, but corrected himself, and merely stared stupidly at him.

"You win eleven hundred Napoleons if you do go on," said the other, showing in proof of his assertion the card on which he had marked all the chances.

"And where's the money?" cried Dalton, as, with a hissing utterance, he spoke, and he pointed to the table before him. "Have I Coutts's bank at my back, or is all Lombard Street in my pocket? 'Tis easy to say, go on! Red again, by Jingo!"

"I tell you dat!" said the other, gravely.

Dalton turned round in his chair, and stared steadfastly at the speaker. His mind was in that state of wild confusion, when every conception, however vague and fanciful, assumes a certain degree of reality, and superstitions take on them all the force of warnings. What if his prompter were the devil himself! was it not exactly what he had often heard of? He never saw him there before, and certainly appearances were not much against the hypothesis. He was tall and spare, with a high, narrow forehead, and a pair of most treacherous-looking black eyes, that seemed to let nothing escape their vigilance. Unabashed by, or indifferent to, Dalton's scrutiny, he went on with his chronicle of the game, noting down the chances, and only muttering a few words to himself.

"Nine times red," said he, as he counted the scores.

"Will it go ten?" asked Dalton, with a purposelike energy that showed his faith in the oracle; but the other never heeded the question.

"Back de red, I say; back de red dis time," whispered he in Dalton's ear.

"Don't you see that I have no money," said Dalton, angrily.

"Dey will lend on your name; ask for a hundred Naps. Be quick, be quick."

Dalton stooped across the table, and whispered the croupier, who returned a look of doubt and uncertainty. Peter grew more pressing, and the other bent over, and spoke to his colleague. This time the request was not met with a smile and a bland bow, and Dalton watched with angry impatience all the signs of hesitation and deliberation between them.

"Say your banker is closed—that you must have de moneys," whispered the dark man.

"Must I wait till the bank is open to-morrow morning," said Dalton, "or do you mean to give me this trifle?"

"Our rules are strictly opposed to the practice of lending, count," whispered the croupier at his side; "we have already transgressed them in your favour, and——"

"Oh, don't inconvenience the count," interposed his colleague. "How much is it?"

"Say two hundred—two!" muttered the unknown.

"Two hundred Naps.," cried Dalton, resolutely.

"This will make five hundred and forty to-night, count."

"And if it was five thousand," said Peter, running his fingers through the gold with ecstacy, "what matter? There goes fifty on the red."

"Ah, you play too rash," whispered the dark man.

"What business is it of yours? am I your ward?" cried Dalton, passionately, for the stake was lost in the instant. "Red, again fifty. May I never! if I don't believe 'tis *you* brings me the bad luck," said Dalton, darting a savage glance at the other, whose impassive face never betrayed the slightest emotion.

"I no wish to disturb your game, saar," was the meek reply of the dark man; and with a bow of meek humility he backed through the crowd and disappeared.

In a moment Dalton felt shocked at his own rudeness, and would have given worlds to have recalled his words, or even apologized for them; but other thoughts soon supplanted these, and again his whole heart was in the game.

"You didn't bet last time," remarked some one near him, "and your favourite colour won."

"No, I was looking about me. I was thinking of something else," replied he; and he sat fingering the gold pieces as though unwilling to part with them.

The game went on; luck came and went; the gold glittered and clinked; the same endless "refrain"—"Faites votre jeu, Messieurs," followed by the same sing-song phrases, continued to roll on, and Dalton sat, now counting his money, and piling up the pieces into tens or twenties; or, with his head resting on his hand, deep in serious thought. Twice he placed a heavy stake upon the table, and recalled it at the very moment of the game's beginning. Every gesture and action showed the terrible struggle between hope and fear that went on within him. A red spot glowed on one cheek, while the other was pale as death, and his lips from time to time were moved with a short spasmodic jerk, as if some sudden pain shot through him. At last, with a great effort, he pushed all the gold into the centre of the table, and cried out, but in a voice so strange and inarticulate, that the words could not be distinguished.

"You said 'rouge,' count, I think?" asked the croupier.

"I fancy the gentleman said 'noir,'" remarked a bystander.

"Let him declare for himself," observed another.

"But the game has already begun," said the banker.

"So much the worse for the bank," remarked another, laughing, "for it's easy to see what will win."

"Pray declare your colour, sir," said an impatient gambler at Dalton's side; "the whole table is waiting for you."

Dalton started, and, darting an angry look at the speaker, made an effort to rise from the table. He failed at first, but grasping the shoulder of the croupier, he arose to his full height, and stared around him. All was hushed and still, not a sound was heard, as in that assembly, torn with so many passions, every eye was turned towards the gigantic old man, who, with red eyeballs and outstretched hands, seemed to hurl defiance at them. Backwards and forwards he swayed for a second or two, and then, with a low, faint cry—the last wail of a broken heart—he fell with a crash upon the table. There he lay, his white hairs streaming over the gold and silver pieces, and his bony fingers flattened upon the cards. "A fit!—he's in a fit!" cried some, as they endeavoured to raise him.—"Worse still!" remarked another, and he passed his hand from the pulse to the heart, "he is dead!"

The hero of a hundred fights, he who has seen death in every shape and on every field, must yield the palm of indifference to its terrors to the gambler. All the glorious insanity of a battle, all the reckless enthusiasm of a storm, even the headlong impetuosity of a charge, cannot supply the cold apathy of the gambler's heart; and so was it that they saw in that lifeless form nothing beyond a disagreeable interruption to their game, and muttered their impatience at the delay in its removal.

"Well," said Mrs. Ricketts, as she sat in an adjoining apartment, "have you any tidings of our dear 'Amphytrion?'—is he winning to-night?" The question was addressed to the tall, dark man, who so lately had been standing behind Dalton's chair, and was our old acquaintance, Count Petrolaffsky.

"He no win no more, madame," replied he solemnly.

"Has he gone away, then?—has he gone home without us?"

"He has gone home, indeed—into the other world," said he, shaking his head.

"What do you mean, count? For Heaven's sake, speak intelligibly."

"I mean as I do say, madame. He play a game as would ruin Rothschild; always change, and always at de wrong time. and never know when to make his 'paroli.' Ah, dat is de gran' secret of all play; when you know when to make your 'paroli' you win de whole world! Well, he is gone now; poor man, he cannot play no more!"

"Martha—Scroope, do go—learn something—see what has happened."

"Oh, here's the colonel. Colonel Haggerstone, what is this dreadful news I hear?"

"Your accomplished friend has taken French leave of you, madame, and was in such a hurry to go, that he wouldn't wait for another turn of the cards."

"He ain't d-d-dead?" screamed Purvis.

"I'm very much afraid they insist on burying him to-morrow or next day, under that impression, sir," said Haggerstone.

"What a terrible event!—how dreadful!" said Martha, feelingly; "and his poor daughter, who loved him so ardently!"

"That must be thought of," interrupted Mrs. Ricketts, at once roused to activity by thoughts of self-interest. "Scroope, order the carriage at once. I must break it to her myself. Have you any particulars for me, colonel?"

"None, madame! If coroners were the fashion here, they'd bring in a verdict of 'died from backing the wrong colour, with a deodand against the rake!'"

"Yes, it is ver' true, he always play bad," muttered the Pole.

And now the room began to fill with people discussing the late incident in every possible mood, and with every imaginable shade of sentiment. A few—a very few—dropped some expressions of pity and compassion. Many preferred to make a display of their own courage by a bantering, scornful tone, and some only saw in the event how unsuited certain natures were to contend with the changeful fortunes of high play. These were, for the most part, Dalton's acquaintances, and who had often told him—at least, so they now took credit for—that "he had no head for play." Interspersed with these were little discussions as to the immediate cause of death, as full of ignorance and as ingenious as such explanations usually are, all being contemptuously wound up by Haggerstone's remark, "That death was like matrimony—very difficult when wanted, but impossible to escape when you sought to avoid it!" As this remark had the benefit of causing a blush to poor Martha, he gave his arm to the ladies, with a sense of gratification that came as near happiness as anything he could imagine.

"Is Miss Dalton in the drawing-room?" said Mrs. Ricketts, as with an air of deep importance she swept through the hall of the villa.

"She's in her room, madame," said the maid.

"Ask if she will receive me—if I may speak to her."

The maid went out, and returned with the answer that "Miss Dalton was sleeping."

"Oh, let her sleep!" cried Martha. "Who knows when she will taste such rest again?"

Mrs. Ricketts bestowed a glance of withering scorn on her sister, and pushed roughly past her, towards Nelly's chamber. A few minutes after a wild, shrill shriek was heard through the house, and then all was still.

CHAPTER XXI.

NELLY'S SORROWS.

Stunned, but not overcome, by the terrible shock, Nelly Dalton sat beside the bed where the dead man lay in all that stern mockery of calm so dreadful to look upon. Some candles burned on either side, and threw a yellowish glare over the bold strong features on which her tears had fallen, as, with a cold hand clasped in his, she sat and watched him.

With all its frequency, Death never loses its terrors for us! Let a man be callous as a hard world, and a gloomy road in it, can make him; let him drug his mind with every anodyne of infidelity; let him be bereft of all affection, and walk alone on his life road; there is yet that which can thrill his heart in the aspect of the lips that are never to move more, and the eyes that are fixed for ever. But what agony of suffering is it when the lost one has been the link that tied us to life—the daily object of our care—the motive of every thought and every action! Such had been her father to poor Nelly. His wayward, capricious humours, all his infirmities of temper and body, had called forth those exertions which made the business of her life, and gave a purpose and direction to her existence; now, repaid by some passing expression of thankfulness or affection, or, better still, by some transient gleam of hope that he was stronger in health, or better in spirits, than his wont; now rallied by that sense of duty which can ennoble the humblest, as it can the greatest of human efforts, she watched over him as might a mother over an ailing child. Catching at his allusions to "home," as he still called it, she used to feed her hopes with thinking that at some distant day they were to return to their own land again, and pass their last years in tranquil retirement together; and now hope and duty were alike extinguished. "The fount that fed the river of her thoughts" was dry, and she was alone—utterly alone—in the world!

Old Andy, recalled by some curious instinct to a momentary activity, shuffled about the room, snuffing the candles, or muttering a faint prayer at the bedside; but she did not notice him any more than the figure who, in an attitude of deep devotion, knelt at the foot of the bed. This was Hanserl, who, book in hand, recited the offices with all the fervent rapidity of a true Catholic. Twice he started and looked up from his task, disturbed by some noise without; but when it occurred a third time, he laid his book gently down, and stole noiselessly from the room. Passing rapidly through the little chamber, which used to be called Nelly's drawing-room, he entered the larger dining-room, in which now three or four ill-dressed men were standing, in the midst of whom was Abel Kraus in active colloquy with Mr. Purvis. Hanserl made a gesture to enforce silence, and pointed to the room from whence he had just come.

"Ah!" cried Scroope, eagerly, "you're a kind of co-co-connection, or friend, at least, of these people, ain't you? Well, then, speak to this wo-worthy man, and tell him that he mustn't detain our things here; we were merely on a visit."

"I will suffer nothing to leave the house till I am paid to the last kreutzer," said Kraus, sternly; "the law is with me, and I know it."

"Be patient; but, above all, respect the dead," said Hans, solemnly. "It is not here, nor at this time, these things should be discussed."

"But we wa-want to go, we have ta-ta-taken our apartments at the 'Russie.' The sight of a funeral and a—a—a hearse, and all that, would kill my sister."

"Let her pay these moneys, then, and go in peace," said Kraus, holding forth a handful of papers.

"Not a gr-groschen, not a kreutzer will we pay. It's an infamy, it's a sh-sh-shameful attempt at robbery. It's as bad as st-stopping a man on the highway."

"Go on, sir—go on. You never made a speech which cost you dearer," said Kraus, as he took down the words in his pocket-book.

"I—I—I didn't mean that; I didn't say you were a housebreaker."

"Speak lower," said Hans, sternly. "And you, sir; what is this demand?"

"Two thousand francs—rent of this house; which, with damage to the furniture and other charges, will make two thousand eight hundred."

"I will pay it," said Hans, stopping him.

"Your credit would be somewhat better, Master Hans, had you not given a certain bail bond that you know of," said Kraus, sneeringly.

"I have wherewith to meet my debts," said Hans, calmly.

"I will claim my bond within a week—I give you notice of it," said Kraus.

"You shall be paid to-morrow. Let us be in peace to-night—bethink you what that room contains."

"He ain't black, is he? I—I wouldn't look at him for a thousand pounds," said Purvis, with a shudder.

"If she remain here after noon, to-morrow," said Kraus, in a low voice, "a new month will have begun."

"To-morrow afternoon—Lord! how close he r-ran it." exclaimed Purvis.

"Once more, I say, be patient," said Hans. "Let these good people go. You shall lose nothing—I pledge the word of a man who never told a falsehood. I will pay all. Have some pity, however, for this orphan—one who has now neither a home nor a country."

"Yes, yes, he'll have p-pity; he's an excellent man is Mr. Kraus. I shouldn't wonder if we'd come to terms about this vi-villa for ourselves."

Hans turned a look of anger towards him, and then said: "Go, sir, and take those that belong to you away also. This place no longer can suit you nor them. He who lies yonder can be flattered and fawned on no more; and, as for her, she is above your compassion, if it even lay in your heart to offer it."

"He ain't quite right here," whispered Purvis to Kraus, as he tapped his forehead significantly. "They told me that, in the town." Kraus moved away without reply, and Purvis followed him. "He's rich, too, they say," added he, in a whisper.

"They'll scarcely say as much this day week," said Kraus, sneeringly; while, beckoning his people to follow him, he left the house.

No sooner did Mrs. Ricketts learn that her worldly possessions were safe, and that the harpy clutches of the law could make no seizure among those curious turbans and wonderful tunics which composed her wardrobe, than she immediately addressed herself to the active duties of the hour with a mind at ease, and, while packing her trunks, inadvertently stowed away such little stray articles as might not be immediately missed, and might serve hereafter to recall thoughts of "poor dear Miss Dalton," for so she now preferred to name her.

"Those little box figures, Martha; don't forget them. They of course don't belong to the house; and Scroope suspects that the bracket for the hall lamp must have been her carving also."

"I've p-put away two pencil drawings marked "E. D.,' and a little sketch in oil of the Alten Schloss; and I've my pockets stuffed with the tulip roots."

"Well thought of, Scroope; and there's a beautiful paper-knife—poor thing, she's not likely to want it now. What a sad bereavement! And are his affairs really so bad?"

"Ov-over head and ears in debt. There ain't enough to bury him if the dwarf does not shell out—but he will They say he's in love with Nelly—he, he, he!"

"Shocking, quite shocking. Yes, Martha, that telescope is a very good one. What improvidence—what culpable improvidence!"

"And is she quite friendless?" asked Martha, feelingly.

"Not while she has *our* protection," said Mrs. Ricketts, grandly. "I've determined 'to take her up.'"

Martha reddened slightly at the phrase, for she knew of some others who had been so "taken up," and with what small profit to their prosperity.

"Her talents, when aided by *our* patronage, will always support her," said Mrs. Ricketts, "and I mean, when the shock of this calamity is past, to employ her on a little group for a centrepiece for our dinner table. She will, of course, be charmed to have her genius displayed to such advantage. It will afford us a suitable opportunity of introducing her name."

"And we shall have the piece of carving for nothing," said Martha, who innocently believed that she was supplying another argument of equal delicacy and force.

"You're an idiot!" said Mrs Ricketts, angrily, "and I begin to fear you will never be anything else."

"I'm quite sure I shall not," muttered the other, with a faint submissiveness, and continued the task of packing the trunks.

"Take care that you find out her sister's address, Martha. I'm sadly in want of some furs; that tippet, I suppose, is only fit for *you* now, and my sable muff is like a dog in the mange. The opportunity is a most favourable one, for when the princess, as they persist in calling her, knows that her sister is our dependant, we may make our own terms. It would be the very ruin of her in St. Petersburg to publish such a fact."

"But Miss Dalton will surely write to her herself."

"She can be persuaded, I trust, to the contrary," said Mrs. Ricketts, knowingly; "she can be shown that such an appeal would in all likelihood wreck her sister's fortunes, that the confession of such a relationship would utterly destroy her position in that proud capital; and, if she prove obstinate, the letter need not go; you understand that, at least," added she, with a contemptuous glance that made poor Martha tremble.

Mrs. Ricketts was now silent, and sat revelling in the various thoughts that her active mind suggested. Upon the whole, although Dalton's dying was an inconvenience, there were some compensating circumstances. She had gained a most useful *protégée* in Nelly—one whose talents might be made of excellent use, and whose humble, unpretending nature would exact no requital. Again, the season at Baden was nearly over; a week or two more, at most, was all that remained. The "Villino," which she had left for the summer to some confiding family, who believed that Florence was a paradise in July and August, would again be at her disposal, and, in fact, as she phrased it, "the conjunctures were all felicitous," and her campaign had not been unfruitful. This latter fact attested itself in the aspect of her travelling carriage, with its "spolia" on the roof, and its various acquired objects under the body. Pictures, china, plate, coins, brocades, old lace, books, prints, manuscripts, armour, stained glass, trinkets, and relics of all kinds, showed that travel with her was no unprofitable occupation, and that she had realized the grand desideratum of combining pleasure with solid advantage.

Meanwhile, so ingenious is thorough selfishness, she fancied herself a benefactor of the whole human race. All the cajoleries she used to practise, she thought were the amiable overflowings of a kindly nature; her coarse flatteries she deemed irresistible fascinations; her duperies even seemed only the triumphs of a mind transcendently rich in resources, and never for a moment suspected that the false coin she was uttering could be called in question, though the metal was too base for imposition. There is no supply without demand, and if the world did not like such characters there would be none of them! The Rickettses are, however, a large and an increasing class of society, and, to our national shame be it said, they are distinctively English in origin. And now we leave her, little regretting if it be for ever; and if we turn to a darker page in our story, it is, at least, to one wherein our sympathies are more fairly enlisted.

That long night passed over like a dreary dream, and morning was now mingling its beams with the glare of the tapers, as Nelly sat beside the death-bed.

"Come with me, Fräulein! come away from this," said Hanserl, as with a tearful eye and quivering lip he stood before her.

Nelly shook her head slowly, and for answer turned her gaze on the dead man.

"You shall come back again; I promise you, you shall come back again," said he, softly.

She arose without a word and followed him. They passed through an outer room, and entered the garden, where Hans, taking her hand, led her to a seat.

"You will be better here, Fräulein," said he, respectfully; "the air is fresh and balmy."

"He sat beside me on this bench three nights ago," said she, as if talking to herself, "and said how he wished I could be with Kate, but that he could not part with me; and see—we are parted, and for a longer separation! Oh, Hanserl! what we would give to recall some of the past, when death has closed it for ever against us!"

"Remember Wieland, Fräulein; he tells us that 'the Impossible is a tree without fruit or flowers!'"

"And yet my mind will dwell on nothing else. The little thwartings of his will—the cold compliance which should have been yielded in a better spirit—the counsels that often only irritated—how they rise up now, like stern accusers, before me, and tell me that I failed in my duty."

"Not so, Fräulein—not so," said Hans, reverently.

"But there is worse than that, Hanserl, far worse," said she, trembling. "To smooth the rough path of life, I descended to deception. I told him the best when my heart felt the worst. Had he known of Kate's real life, and had he sorrowed over *her* fortunes, might not such grief have been hallowed to him! To have wept over Frank—the poor boy in prison—might have raised his thoughts to other themes than the dissipation that surrounded him. All this was *my* fault. I would have his love, and see the price it has cost me!" She hid her face between her hands, and never spoke for a long time. And at length she lifted up her eyes, red as they were with weeping, and, with a heavy sigh, said, "How far is it to Vienna, Hanserl?"

"To Vienna, Fräulein! It is a long journey—more than four hundred miles. But why do you ask?"

"I was thinking that if I saw Count Stephen—if I could but tell him our sad story myself—he might intercede for poor Frank, and perhaps obtain his freedom His crime can scarcely be beyond the reach of mercy, and his youth will plead for him. And is it so far away, Hanserl?"

"At the very least—and a costly journey too."

"But I would go on foot, Hans. Lame as I am, I can walk for miles without fatigue, and I feel as if the exertion would be a solace to me, and that my mind, bent upon a good object, could the more easily turn away from my own desolation. Oh, Hans, think me not selfish that I speak thus; but thoughts of my own loneliness are so linked with all I have lost, I cannot separate them. Even the humble duty that I filled gave a value to my life, without which my worthlessness would have crushed me; for what could poor lame Nelly be—I, that had no buoyancy for the young, no ripe judgment for the old? And yet, in caring for him that is gone, I found a taste of love and happiness."

"I will go with you, Fräulein; you shall not take this weary road alone. Heaven knows that, without you, this place would be too dreary for me."

"But your house, Hanserl—all that you possess—the fruits of all your hard industry——"

"Speak not of them," said Hans, reddening. "They who deem me rich are mistaken. I have speculated ill—I have made bad ventures—and what I have will but pay my debts, and I will be glad to quit this spot."

"And I," said Nelly, with a voice of deep emotion, "I cannot say that I can help you. I know nothing of what may remain to me in this world; my father never spoke to me latterly of his means, and I may be, for aught I know, a beggar. Will you see his banker and speak with him?"

"I have done so," said Hans, slowly. "He claims some small sum as due to him."

"And how am I to pay it?" said Nelly, growing pale. "It is true, I can labour——"

"Have no care for this, Fräulein. It shall be looked to, and you shall repay it hereafter."

"Oh, Hanserl, beware!" said she, solemnly; "we are an unfortunate race to those who help us; my poor father often said so, and even his superstitions are hallowed to me, now."

A gesture from some one within the house called Hans away, and Nelly was left alone. She sat with her eyes closed and her arms firmly clasped, deep in her own sad thoughts, when she heard a footstep close by. It was only Andy, who, with a piece of ragged crape fastened round his arm, was slowly tottering towards her. His face was flushed, and his eyes wild and excited, as he continued to mutter and reply to himself,—

"A Dalton—one of the ould stock—and maybe the last of them, too."

"And what is it, Andy?—tell me, what is it?" said she, kindly.

"There's no wake—there isn't as much as a tenant's child would have!"

"We are almost friendless here, Andy. It is not our own country."

"Ain't they Christians, though? Couldn't they keep the corpse company? Is it four candles and a deal coffin ought to be at a Dalton's burial?"

"And we are poor also," said she, meekly.

"And hasn't the poorest respect for the dead?" said he, sternly. "Wouldn't they sell the cow, or the last pig, out of honour to him that's gone to glory? I'll not stay longer in the place; I'll have my discharge; I'll go back to Ireland."

"Poor fellow," said Nelly, taking his hand, kindly, and seating him beside her. "You loved him so! and he loved *you*, Andy. He loved to hear you sing your old songs, and tell over the names of his favourite hounds."

"Bessy and Countess were the sweetest among them," said the old man, wandering away to old memories of the past, "but Nora was truer than either." And so he fell into a low mumbling to himself, endeavouring, as it seemed, to recall the forgotten line of some hunting chant, while Nelly returned to the house to take her last farewell ere the coffin lid was closed.

CHAPTER XXII.

A LAST ADIEU.

The pleasure-seekers of Baden were not likely to be diverted from their pursuits by such humble calamities as Nelly Dalton's, and the gay world went on its gay road as merrily as though death or ruin could have no concern for them. Already the happy groups were gathering before the Cursaal. The sounds of music filled the air. Wealth was displaying its gorgeous attractions; beauty, her fascinations; and wit, its brilliancy; and none had a thought for that sad episode which a few hours had half obliterated from every mind. Under a spreading chestnut-tree, and around a table sumptuously spread for breakfast, a large party was assembled, discussing the news of the morning, and the plans of pleasure for the day. Some had but thoughts for the play-table, and could attune their ears to no other sounds than the clink of the gold and the rake of the croupier; others chatted of the world of politics and fashion; and a few, with that love of the picturesque the taste for painting engenders, were admiring the changeful effects of passing clouds on the landscape, and pointing out spots of peculiar beauty and sublimity.

"How well the Alten Schloss looks, with that mass of shadow on it," remarked a young man to a fair and delicate-looking girl beside him; "and see how the weeping ash waves over the old walls, like a banner."

"And look!" cried she, "mark that little procession that is slowly winding up the pathway—what effect a few figures give to the scene, as they appear and disappear with each turning of the road. Some pilgrimage to a holy shrine, I fancy."

"No; it is a funeral. I can mark what Shelley calls the step of the bearers 'heavy and slow;' and if you listen, you'll catch the sound of the death-bell."

"It's quite a picture, I declare," said she. "I wish I had brought my sketch-book."

And so it is ever! The sorrows that are rending some hearts in twain are but as objects of picturesque effect to others. And even the young and the tender-minded learn to look on the calamities that touch them not as things of mere artistic meaning.

Up that steep road, over rock and rugged stone, brushing between the tangled briers, or with difficulty being turned around some sharp angle, was now borne the corpse of him who had so often wended the same path on his homeward way. Four peasants carried the coffin, which was followed by Nelly and old Andy; Hans, from a sense of respect, walking behind them. It was a long and arduous ascent, and they were often obliged to halt and take breath; and at such times Nelly would kneel down beside the coffin and pray. The sufferings of the last two days had left deep traces on her features, which had lost every tinge of colour; her eyes, too, were deep-set and heavy; but in the elevated expression of her brow at moments, and the compression of her lips, might be seen the energy of one who had a firm purpose, and was resolved to carry it through.

"Sit down and rest yourself, Fräulein," said Hans, as he saw that she faltered in her step. "We are yet far from the top."

"I will rest at the fountain," said she, faintly. "It was a favourite spot of his." And they moved slowly on once more.

The fountain was a little well, carved in the native rock, around which some rude seats were also fashioned, the whole sheltered by a thick roof of foliage, which, even in noonday, cast a deep shadow around, and effectually screened it from the path that wound along beside it.

Scarcely had the bearers deposited the coffin beside the well, when the sound of voices was heard as a considerable number of persons descended the path. Words in French, German, and English showed that the party consisted of representatives of these nations; but one voice, if once heard not readily forgotten, towered high above all the rest.

"I cannot offer my arm, madam," cried a sharp, ringing accent, "as the infernal road will not admit of two abreast, but I can go before and pilot you."

"Oh, thanks, sir," replied a mild, meek tone; "I can get on very well indeed. I am only uneasy about my sister."

"I don't suspect that she incurs either much risk or fatigue, madam," rejoined the other, "seeing that she is seated in an arm-chair, and carried by two of the stoutest fellows in Baden."

"But the exertion, in her weak state——"

"She might make the ascent of Mont Blanc, madam, with the same appliances; and if you only told her that there were bargains to be had at the top, I verily believe she would do so."

"You don't think the things were cheap here, colonel?" said Miss Martha, who thought by a diversion to draw Haggerstone away from so dangerous a discussion.

"I am no connoisseur in Dutch dolls—nor Noah's arks, madam, although modern society presents us with something very like both; but I concluded that the prices were not exorbitant. I went there myself from a sense of equity. I once put a bullet into the little rascal's skin, and I have bought a salad-fork and a nut-crackers in requital."

"It was kindly thought of," sighed Martha, gently.

"They only cost me nine kreutzers, madam," rejoined Haggerstone, who was more afraid of being thought a dupe than ill-natured, "so that my sense of generosity did not make a fool of me, as it did with the dwarf himself."

"How so?"

"Why, in going security for that old Irishman, Dalton. It is to pay this debt that he has been sold out to-day, and I fancy that Swiss cottages and barking poodles will realize a very small dividend."

"Oh, Hanserl!" said Nelly, "what do I hear?"

"Hush, Fräulein!" said he, with a gesture to enforce silence. "I will tell you of these things hereafter."

And now the others passed, and were soon out of hearing.

"Oh, Hanserl!" cried Nelly, bitterly, "how misfortunes crowd upon me! It was but a moment back I was feeding my mind with the sad consolation that my griefs were all my own—that the gloom of my dreary fortune cast no shadow on another; and now I see that I was wrong. *You* must pay the dear penalty of having befriended us!—the fruits of all your hard years of industry!"

"And you would rob me of their best reward—the glorious sense of a generous action?" broke in Hans. "They *were* years of toil and privation, and they might have been years of pleasure if avarice and greed had grown upon me, but I could not become a miser."

"The home you had made your own, lost to you for ever!" sighed Nelly.

"It was no longer a home when you left it."

"The well-won provision for old age, Hanserl."

"And has not this event made me young again, and able to brave the world, were it twice as adverse as ever I found it? Oh, Fräulein, you know not the heart-bounding ecstasy of him who, from the depths of an humble station, can rise to do a service to those he looks up to! And yet it is that thought which now warms my blood, and gives an energy to my nature, that, even in youth, I never felt."

Nelly was silent; and now neither spoke a word, but sat with bent-down heads, deep sunk in their own reveries. At last she arose, and once more the sad procession resumed its way. They toiled slowly along till they reached the little level table-land, where the church stood—a little chapel, scarcely larger than a shrine, but long venerated as a holy spot. Poor Dalton had often spent hours here, gazing on the wide expanse of plain, and mountain, and forest, that stretched away beneath; and it was in one of his evening rambles that he had fixed upon the spot where they should lay him, if he could not "rest his bones with his forefathers."

"Sixty-eight!" muttered the old priest, as he read the inscription on the coffin-lid—"in the pride and vigour of manhood! Was he noble, that I see these quarterings painted here?"

"Hush—that is his daughter," whispered Hanserl.

"If he were of noble blood, he should have lain in the chapel, and on a catafalque," muttered the priest.

"The family is noble—but poor," said Hans, in a low whisper.

"A low mass, without the choir, would not ruin the poorest," said the priest, who sprinkled the coffin with half impatience, and, mumbling a few prayers, retired. And now the body was committed to the earth, and the grave was filled. The last sod was patted down with the shovel; and Nelly, unable to bear her grief any longer in silence, threw herself on the spot, and wept bitterly. Hans withdrew, and motioned to the others to follow him; and none remained but old Andy, who, on his knees, and with clasped hands, seemed to think that he was praying, although all his attention was directed to a little group of children who stood near, and whom he awed into reverence by many a threatening gesture.

And thus the long day stole over; and it was only as evening drew nigh that Nelly could be induced to take her last farewell, and breathe her last prayer over the grave of her father.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TYROL JOURNEY.

If our task as story-teller had not other claims on us, we would gladly linger with Nelly Dalton, as, in company with Hanserl and old Andy, she wended her slow way through the deep valleys of the Schwartzwald. The little party might have created astonishment in even more frequented districts than the primitive tract in which they journeyed, and have suggested many a puzzling doubt as to what rank or condition they belonged to. For Andy's convenience Hans had purchased an ass and a small cart, such as are sometimes used by the travelling beggars of every land. Seated in this, and in his old hunting-cap and scarlet coat, the old man fancied it was some pleasure excursion, or that he was "trundling along" to "cover," as he used to do sixty years ago. Nelly walked at his side, now roused from her deep musings to reply to some meaningless question of the old man, or now, feeding her sad memories as she listened to the little snatches of song which occasionally broke from him. Hanserl formed the rear-guard, making, with his redoubted battle-axe and a most formidable old Turkish pistol, not the least singular figure in the procession. Their very baggage too had something strange and incomprehensible to common eyes; for, amidst stray scraps of old armour, the little remnants of Hanserl's collection, were to be seen an unfinished figure by Nelly's hand, or the rude beginning of some new group. Along with these were books and tools, and an infinity of queer costumes, of the dwarf's own designing, for various seasons of the year.

Still, there was no impertinence in the curiosity that met them. If Andy's strange equipage and stranger dress might have raised a smile, Nelly's gentle look and modest air as rapidly checked it, and they who would have laughed outright at Hanserl's mock-chieftainship were subdued to a respectful deference by the placid dignity of her who walked before him. It was in that memorable year whose doings are recorded in our memory with all the solemn force of History, and all the distinct and vivid effect of events passing before our own eyes; that era, when Thrones rocked and tottered, and kings, who seemed destined to transmit their crowns to unborn generations, became exiles, and cast away, their state a mockery, and their princely homes given up to pillage; when the brightest day-dreams of good men became bound up with the wildest imaginings of the bold and the bad, and the word Freedom comprehended all that was most glorious in self-devotion, and all that was most relentless in hate,—in that troubled time, Hanserl wisely sought out the districts of mountain and crag—the homes of the hunter—in preference to the more travelled roads, and prudently preferred even the devious windings of the solitary glens to the thronged and peopled highways that connected great cities.

His plan was to direct their steps through the Vorarlberg into the Tyrol, where, in a small village, near Meran, his mother still lived. There, in case of need, Nelly would find a refuge, and, at all events, could halt while he explored the way to Vienna, and examined how far it might be safe for her to proceed thither. Even in all her affliction, out of the depths of a sorrow so devoid of hope, Nelly felt the glorious influence of the grand scenery through which they travelled. The giant mountains, snow-capped in early autumn, the boundless forests that stretched along their sides, the foaming cataracts as they fell in sheets of hissing water, the tranquil lakes that reflected tower and cliff and spire, the picturesque village, where life seemed to ripple on as peacefully as the clear stream before the peasant's door, the song of the birds, the tolling of the bells, the laugh of the children, the Alp horn answered from cliff to cliff, and dying away in distant echo—all these were realizations of many a girlish hope, when she wished her father to seek out some secluded village, and pass a life of obscure but united labour. There was no Quixotism in the fancy. She knew well what it was to toil and work; to rise early, and go late to rest; to feed on coarse fare, and be clad in mean attire. All that poverty can inflict of privation she had tasted, but fearlessly, and with a bold heart; self-reliance elevating her thoughts above every little adverse incident, and giving to her struggle that character of a task, a holy and a righteous task, which made at once her life's purpose and reward.

Scarcely a village at which they halted that did not strike her as like what her mind had often pictured for "their own," and many a quaint old house, with its carved galleries and latticed porch, she stood to gaze on, fancying it their home, and peopling every spot with the forms of those she loved. Oh! why had they not chosen this humble road?—why had their "Paths in Life" separated?—were the bitter reflections which now filled her eyes with tears and made her bosom heave almost to bursting. She did not foolishly suppose that the peasant can claim exemption from the trials and crosses of life, and that sorrow finds no entrance into remote and unfrequented tracts, but she knew that such burdens would not be too heavy for their strength, and that, while living a life of unpretending poverty, they should be free from the slavery of an assumed position, and able to combat the world fairly and honestly.

Of all lands the Tyrol is best suited to foster such feelings as these. There is a harmony and a keeping about it that is rarely found elsewhere. The dwellings of the people, so according with the character of the scenery; the costumes, the greetings, the songs of the peasantry; their simple and touching piety; their manners, so happily blending independence with courtesy, are felt at once as a charm, and give a colour to the enjoyment of every one who sojourns amongst them. These were the sights and sounds which, better than all the blandishments of wealth, could soothe poor Nelly's sorrow, and make her thankful in the midst of her afflictions even to have witnessed them. As for Hanserl, his excitement grew daily higher as he passed the Arlberg and drew near the spots he had seen in childhood. Now preparing some little surprise for Nelly, as they turned the angle of a cliff and gazed down upon a terrible gorge beneath; now apprising her of some little shrine where pious wayfarers were wont to halt and pray; now speculating if the old host of the village inn would be alive, or still remember him, he went along merrily, occasionally singing some "Alp Lied," or calling to mind some ancient legend of the scene through which they journeyed. Above all, however, was his delight at the thought of seeing his old mother again. No sense of disappointment dashed this pleasure because he was returning poor and penniless. Home and the "Frau Mutter," as he reverently called her, had their hold upon his heart quite distinct from every accident of fortune. To tell her of all he had seen in far-away lands—for Hanserl thought himself a great traveller; to describe the great Cathedral of Worms, its vaulted aisles and painted windows, its saintly effigies and deep-toned organ, and the thousands who could kneel before the high altar! Then what marvellous relics were there to describe!—not to speak of the memorable valley at Eschgau, where "Siegfried slew the Dragon." Poor Hans! the scenes of his youth had made him young again, and it was the very triumph of his joy when he could interest Nelly in some story, or make her listen with attention to the rude verses of some "Tyroler" poem.

Gladly would we linger with them as they went slowly along through the deep valley of Landech, and, halting a day at the Pontlatzer Brücke, that Hans might describe the heroic defence of his countrymen against the French and Bavarian forces, and then, skirting along the Engadine, came in sight of the great Orteler Spitze—the highest of the Tyrol Alps. And now they reached Nauders, and, traversing a wild and dreary mountain tract, where even in autumn the snow is seen in clefts and crevices of the rock, they gradually gain the crest of the ridge, and look down at length on glorious Meran with the devotion of the pilgrim in sight of the Holy City. Hans knelt down and prayed fervently as his eyes beheld that garden valley with its vine-clad slopes and waving woods; its silvery river gliding along beneath bright villages and feudal castles. But soon he saw them no longer, for his eyes swam over with tears, and he sobbed like a child.

"There, Fräulein, yonder, where you see the river winding to the southward, you see an old tower—'the Passayer Turm,' it is called; the Frau Mutter lives there. I see some one in the garden." And, overcome by emotion, he hid his face and wept.

Near as they seemed to the end of their journey, it was night ere they gained the valley at the foot of the mountain. The cottages were closed, and, except in the town—still about a mile distant—not a light was to be seen. The Tyrolers are an early race, and retire to rest soon after dusk. Hanserl, however, wanted no guidance to the way, and trudged along in front of the cart, following each winding of the track as though he had gone it but the day before. Except a chance caution about the road, he never spoke—his heart was full of "home." The fatigue of a long day's journey, and the cold of the night air, had made Andy querulous and discontented, and it was all Nelly could do to answer the fretful questions and soothe down the irritation of the old man; but Hans heard nothing of either. At last they reached a little open space formed by a bend in the river, and came in sight of the old tower, at the foot of which, and abutting against it, stood a small cottage. A light gleamed from a little window, and no sooner had Hans seen it than he exclaimed,—

"Gott sey dank! Fräulein, she is well. That is the Frau Mutter."

Poor Nelly's lip quivered as she tried to speak, for, humble as it was, what would she have given to have had even such a "home"? And now, passing through a little garden, Hans halted, and assisted Andy from the cart.

"Where are we, at all? Sure this isn't a place to stop the night in!" cried the old man, querulously.

"Hush, Andy, hush," whispered Nelly.

"'Tis thieves and vagabonds, maybe, lives here, Miss Nelly," said he, in a low voice.

"No, Andy, no; it is a kind welcome that awaits us."

"Ayeh!" exclaimed he, "I know betther than that!"

Hans by this time had approached the door and raised the latch—for in the Tyrol the night rarely calls for other fastening. Nelly heard the sharp, clear sound of an old woman's voice above the hum of a spinning-wheel, and then the glad burst of joy as the mother recognized her son. Unwilling to interrupt their happiness, Nelly moved away out of hearing, when Hanserl came running out, followed by the old woman.

"This is the Fräulein, mother," cried he, with a burst of delight; and the old woman, taking Nelly's hand, kissed it with deep respect.

With native courtesy she welcomed Nelly, and, as she entered her house, pointed with pride to a Madonna of Nelly's own carving, which stood on a bracket against the wall.

"You see, Fräulein," said she, "how I have known you for many a day back; and there is your Saint Christopher, and there the 'Blessed Agnes at the Well.'" And so was it. The groups and figures which she believed to have been sold by Hanserl, were all stored up here and treasured like household gods. "Many a traveller has come here just to see these," continued the old peasant woman, "and many a tempting sum have they offered if I would sell them, but in all my poverty I did not stoop to this."

"Frau Mutter, Frau Mutter," said Hans, rebukingly, and trying to cut short what he feared might offend Nelly.

"Nay, Hanserl, it is but the truth," said she, firmly; "I will not say that I did not do more wisely too, for they who came left me always some little present. Even the poor gave me their blessing, and said that they were happier when they had prayed before the blessed Agnes." While thus running on in all the garrulity of old age, she never neglected the care of receiving her guests with suitable hospitality. Old Andy was accommodated with a deep straw chair near the stove. The little chamber, which, for its view upon the Passayer Thal, had been specially devoted to receive travellers, was got ready for Nelly, and Hans, once more at home, busied himself in arranging the household, and preparing supper.

"You are wondering at all the comforts you find here, Hanserl," said the old woman, "but see here, this will tell you whence they came;" and, opening an old ebony cabinet, she took out a large square letter with a heavy seal. "That reached me on a Christmas-day, Hanserl; the paper was from the Imperial Chancellerie of Vienna, setting forth that, as the widow of Hans Roëckle, of Meran, born of Tyrol parents, and married to a Tyroler, had attained the age of eighty years, and never asked alms, nor sought for other aid than her own industry, she was now entitled to the Maria Teresa pension of twelve kreutzers a day for the rest of her life. I told them," said the old woman, proudly, "that my son had always taken care to provide for me, and that there were others that might want it more than I, but the kreis-hauptman said, that my refusal would be an offence to the Kaiser, who had heard of my name from one of the archduchesses who travelled this way, and who had seen these blessed images and wished to buy them; so that I was fain to yield, and take, in thankfulness, what was offered in generosity. You see, Hanserl, how true is it, the Fräulein has been our good angel; we have never had bad luck since the Madonna came here!"

Nelly slept soundly that night, and, for the first time since her calamities, her dreams were happy ones. Lulled by the ripple of the river beside her window, and the ceaseless murmuring of the old woman's voice as she sat up talking with her son the whole night long, she tasted at length the sweets of deep and refreshing sleep. And what a gorgeous scene burst upon her waking eyes! Around, on every side of the little plain, rose the great mountains of the Tyrol; some green and tree-clad to their summits, others snow-capped or hid in the azure-coloured clouds above them. Ancient castles crowned the crags, and foaming cataracts leaped from each fissured gorge; while below, in the valley, there lay a garden of rich profusion—the vine, the olive, and the waving corn—with villages and peasant-houses half hid in the luxuriant verdure. From the lowing cattle beside the river to the re-echoing horn upon the mountains, there seemed to come greeting and answer. All was grandeur and sublimity in the scene; but, more striking than these, was the perfect repose, the deep tranquillity of the picture. The sounds were all those of peasant labour, the song of the vine-dresser, the rustling noise of the loaded waggon as it moved through some narrow and leafy road, the hissing of the sickle through the ripe corn.

"And yet," said Hanserl, as Nelly stood in silent enjoyment at the little porch—"and yet, Fräulein, beyond those great mountains yonder, there is strife and carnage.

Here, all is peaceful and happy; but the whole world of Europe is tempest-torn. Italy is up—all her people are in wild revolt—Hungary is in open insurrection. I speak not of other lands, whose fortunes affect us not, but the great empire of our Kaiser is convulsed to its very centre. I have just been at Meran, troops are marching in every hour, and every hour come new messengers to bid them hasten southward. Over the Stelvio, where you see that dark line yonder, near the summit of the mountains, on they pour! They say, too, that Upper Austria is in rebellion, and that the roads from Innspruck are unsafe to travel. We are safe here, Fräulein, but you must not venture further. We will try, from some of the officers who pass through, to glean tidings of the count, your grand-uncle, and where a letter may reach him; but bear with this humble shelter for a while, and think it a home."

If Nelly was disappointed and baffled by this impediment to her journey, she was not one to pass her time in vague regrets, but at once addressed herself to the call of new duties with a willing mind and a cheerful spirit.

Resuming her long-neglected tools, she set to work once more, stimulated by the new scenes and subjects around her. To the little children who often formed her "studies," she became the schoolmistress. To the old who were stricken with sickness or the helplessness of age she used to read for hours together. Every little pathway led her to some office of charity or kindness, till the "good Fräulein" became a village by-word, and her name was treasured, and her footstep welcomed in every cottage around.

Her humble dress, her more humble manner, took nothing from the deference they yielded her. They felt too intensely the inborn superiority of her nature to think of any equality between them, and they venerated her with something like devotion. A physician to the sick, a nurse to the bedridden, a teacher to the ignorant, a blessing and an example to all, Nelly's hours were but too short for the calls of her duties, and, in her care for others, she had no time to bestow on her own sorrows.

As for Hanserl, he worked from daylight to dusk. Already the little garden, weed-grown and uncared-for before, was as blooming as his former one at the Alten

Schloss. Under Nelly's guidance many a device was executed that seemed almost miraculous to the simple neighbours; and the lichen-clad rocks, the waving water-lilies or trellised creepers, which, in the wild wantonness of nature they had never noticed, now struck them as the very creations of genius. Even old Andy was not forgotten in their schemes of happiness; and the old huntsman used to spend hours in the effort to tame a young fox a peasant had brought him—a labour not the less interesting that its progress suffered many a check, and that many a laugh arose at the backslidings of the pupil.

And now we leave them for a brief season, all occupied and all happy; nor do we like the fate that calls us away to other and very different associates.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FLORENCE.

It was of a calm but starless night in winter that Florence was illuminated in honour of a victory over the Austrian troops at Goito. Never was patriotic ardour higher—never were stronger the hopes of Italian independence. From the hour of their retreat from Milan, the imperial forces had met with little but reverses, and, as day by day they fell back towards the Tyrol Alps, the hosts of their enemies swelled and increased around them; and from Genoa to the Adriatic all Italy was in march to battle. It is not to speculate on the passable current of events, nor yet to dwell on the causes of that memorable failure, by which dissentient councils and false faith—the weakness of good men and the ambition of bad ones—brought ruin when there might have been victory, still less is it to gaze upon the brilliant spectacle of the rejoicing city, that we are now wending our way along the Arno, scarcely stopping to notice the thousand stars that glitter on the Duomo, nor the flickering lines of light which trace out the gigantic tower of the Palazzo Vecchio. Our theme is more humble than the former, and far too serious for such dalliance as the latter.

Leaving the crowded streets, resounding with the wild acclamations and wilder songs of the people, we pass over the Ponte Vecchio, and enter once again the dark abode of Racca Morlache. Whether from any suspicion of his unpopularity with the people, or from some secret necessity for precaution, the door is fastened by many an extra bolt, and more than one massive chain retains the iron shutters of the window. Perhaps there is something in this conscious security that has made him so sparing in his display of external joy, for two dim, discoloured lamps were all that appeared above the door, and these were soon hurled down in contemptuous anger by the populace, leaving the little building in total darkness.

In easy indifference to such harmless insult, and not heeding the loud knock which, from stick or stone, the iron shutters resounded under, the Jew sat at his table in that little chamber beside the Arno, of which the reader already knows the secret. Several decanters of wine are before him, and as he sips his glass and smashes his filbert, his air is that of the very easiest unconcern.

Attempting, but with inferior success, an equal degree of calm, sits the Abbé D'Esmonde on the opposite side of the table. With all his training, his calm features betray at moments certain signs of anxiety, and, while he speaks, you can see that he is listening to the noises in the street without.

"How I detest that song!" said Morlache, as the full swell of a deep-voiced chorus filled the air. "I verily believe the Revolution has not inflicted us with anything more outraging to good taste than the air of 'Viva Pio Nono.'"

"Always excepting Pio Nono himself," said D'Esmonde, "who is far more the child than the father of this movement."

"Not bad for a priest to renounce allegiance to his holy master!" said Racca, laughing.

"You mistake me, Signor Morlache," said D'Esmonde, eagerly. "I spoke of Pio Nono, the politician—the rash innovator of time-honoured institutions—the foolish donor of concessions that must be won back at the price of blood—the man who has been weak enough to head a movement which he ought to have controlled in secret. How the people shout! I hear many a voice in accents of no Italian origin."

"Yes, the city is full of Poles and Hungarians."

"It will soon be time to drop the curtain on this act of the drama, Morlache; enough has been done to show the world the dangerous doctrines of these fanatics. They who cry 'No property in France,' shout 'No King in Germany'—'No Pope in Rome.' The peaceful or well-ordered must be taught to see in *us* their safeguard against these men. They must learn to think the Church the sanctuary it was of old. From all these convulsions which shatter empires, we are the refuge!"

"But you yourself gave the first impulse to this very movement, abbé?"

"And wisely and well we did it! Should we have stood passive to watch the gradual growth of that cursed spirit they miscall independent judgment—that rankest heresy that ever corrupted the human heart? Should we have waited till Protestantism with its Bible had sowed the seeds of that right of judgment which they proclaim is inherent in all men? Would it have been safe policy to admit of discussing what was obligatory to obey, and look on while this enlightenment—as they blasphemously term it—was arraigning the dogma of the Church as unblushingly as they questioned the decree of a minister?"

"I perceive," said the Jew, laughing, "you great politicians are not above taking a lesson from the 'Bourse,' and know the trick of puffing up a bad scheme to a high premium, prepared to sell out the day before 'the fall.'"

"We had higher and nobler views," said D'Esmonde, proudly. "The men who will not come to the altars of the Church must be taught her doctrines before the portals. Our task is to proclaim Rome—eternal Rome—to Europe!"

"Up to this your success has not been signal," said Morlache, with a sneer. "This victory at Goito has given fresh vigour to the Republicans. The Austrians, once driven beyond the Alps, Monarchy will be short-lived in Italy."

"And who says that they will be so driven? Whoever dreams of such a result, save some wild fanatic of Genoa, or some half-informed minister at London? The King of Naples only waits for the excuse of a Calabrian disturbance to recall his contingent. The Pope has already issued an order to Durando not to pass the Po. The Piedmontese themselves are on the verge of an irreparable quarrel—the men of Savoy and the north, for Monarchy; the Genoese, wild with their own ancient ideas of a Ligurian Republic. Is it the Lombards, think you, will conquer Lombardy? or do you fancy that Florence and Pisa are the nurseries of heroes? No, Morlache, the game of revolt is played out in Italy; the last trump is Goito."

"But if, flushed with conquest, the Piedmontese press on to greater successes?"

"They cannot—they would not, even if they could," broke in D'Esmonde. "Is it the Republicans will shed their blood to conquer a kingdom of Upper Italy for Carlo Alberto? Is it the interest of Rome or Naples to see such a power in the Peninsula? Will the troops of the Monarchy, on the other hand, fight for a cause that is to obliterate the throne? No; believe me, their mutual grudges have been well weighed and estimated. We never dared this bold policy without seeing clearly that their interests could never be reconciled!—I think I hear the sound of oars; yes, he must be coming at last!" D'Esmonde opened the window as he spoke, and looked out upon the river, which, reflecting along the sides the gorgeous pageantry of the illumination, was dark as ink in the middle of the stream. "Not a word of this, Morlache, when he joins us," added D'Esmonde.

"*He* is not in your confidence, then?" asked the other.

"*He?* Of course he is not! If for no weightier reasons than that he is English and a Protestant, two things which, however weak they may prove either in patriotism or religion, never fail in their hatred of the Church and her cause. Like one of the Condottieri of old, he has joined the quarrel because hard knocks are usually associated with booty. Whenever he finds that he has no stake on the table, he'll throw down his cards."

"And the other—the Russian?"

"He is more difficult to understand; but I hope to know him yet. Hush, the boat is close in; be cautious!" And, so saying, he filled his glass, and reseated himself in all the seeming ease of careless dalliance. In a few minutes after, the prow of a light skiff touched the terrace, and a man stepped out, and knocked at the shutter.

"Welcome at last," said D'Esmonde, shaking hands with him. "We had almost despaired of seeing you to-night. You appear to have been favoured with a long audience!"

"Yes, confound it!" cried the other, who, throwing off his travelling-cloak, showed the figure of Lord Norwood. "We were kept dangling in an antechamber for nigh an hour. Midchekoff's fault, for he would not give his name, nor say anything more than that we were two officers with secret despatches from the camp. The people in waiting appeared to think the claim a poor one, and came and went, and looked at us, splashed and dirty as we were; but not, even out of curiosity, did one ask us what tidings we brought. We might have stayed till now, I believe, if I had not taken the resolution to follow an old priest—a bishop, I fancy—who seemed to have the *entrée* everywhere, and pushing vigorously after him, I passed through half a dozen ill-lighted rooms, and at last entered a small drawing-room, where the great man was seated at piquet with old Cassandroni, the minister. I must say that, considering the unauthorized style of my approach, nothing could be more well-bred and urbane than his reception of me. I was blundering out some kind of apology for my appearance, when he pointed to a chair, and begged me to be seated. Then, recognizing Midchekoff, who had just come in, he held out his hand to him. I gave him the despatches, which he pushed across the table to Cassandroni, as if it were more *his* 'affair,' and then turning to Midchekoff, conversed with him for some time in a low voice. As it would not have been etiquette to observe him too closely, I kept my eyes on the minister, and, faith, I must say that he could scarcely have looked more blank and out of sorts had the news reported a defeat. I suppose these fellows have a kind of official reserve, which represses every show of feeling; but I own that he folded up the paper with a degree of composure that quite piqued me!

"'Well, Cassandroni,' said his master, 'what's your news?'

"'Very good news, sir,' said the other, calmly. 'His majesty has obtained a signal victory near Goito against a considerable force of the imperial army, under the command of Radetzky. The action was long and fiercely contested, but a successful advance of artillery to the side of a river, and a most intrepid series of cavalry charges, turned the flank of the enemy, and gained the day. The results do not, however, appear equal to the moral effect upon the army, for there were few prisoners, and no guns taken.'

"'That may perhaps be explained,' said I, interrupting; 'for when the Austrians commenced their movement in retreat——' Just as I got thus far, I stopped, for I found that the distinguished personage I was addressing had once more turned to Midchekoff, and was in deep conversation with him, totally regardless of me and my explanation.

"'You have been wounded, my lord?' said he, after a moment.

"'A mere scratch, sir—a poke of a lance,' said I, smarting under the cool indifference of his manner.

"'I hope you're not too much fatigued to stop to supper,' said he; but I arose at the instant, and pleading the excuse of exhaustion and want of rest, begged to be permitted to retire, and here I am, not having tasted anything since I left Padua, and not in the very blandest of tempers either at the graciousness of my reception. As for Midchekoff, he kept his seat as coolly as if he meant to pass his life there; I hesitated for a second or two, expecting that he would join me; but not a bit of it, he smiled his little quiet smile, as much as to say, 'Good night,' and so I left him."

"He is probably detained to give some particulars of the engagement," said D'Esmonde.

"How can he?—he was never in it; he was writing letters all day at head-quarters, and never came up till seven in the evening, when he rode down with a smart groom after him, and gave the Duke of Savoy a sandwich out of a silver case. That will be the only memorable fact he can retail of the day's fortune."

"The cause looks well, however," said D'Esmonde, endeavouring to divert his thoughts into a more agreeable direction.

"Tell me what is the cause, and I will answer you," said Norwood, sternly. "So far as *I* see, we are dividing the spoils before we have hunted down the game."

"You surely have no doubt of the result, my lord?" replied the other, eagerly. "The Austrians must relinquish Italy."

"Then who is to take it—that's the question? Is Lombarby to become Piedmont, or a Red Republic? or are your brethren of the slouched hat to step in and portion out the land into snug nurseries for Franciscans and Ursulines? Egad, I'd as soon give it up to old Morlache yonder, and make it a New Jerusalem to educate a young race of money-lenders and usurers!"

"I wish we had even as much security for our loans," said Morlache, smiling.

"I hear of nothing but money—great loans here—immense sums raised there," cried Norwood; "and yet what becomes of it? The army certainly has seen none of it. Large arrears of pay are due; and, as for us who serve on the staff, we are actually supporting the very force we command."

"We are told that large sums have found their way into Austria in shape of secret service," said D'Esmonde, "and with good result too."

"The very worst of bad policy," broke in Norwood. "Pay your friends and thrash your enemies. Deserters are bad allies at the best, but are utterly worthless if they must be paid for desertion. Let them go over like those Hungarian fellows—a whole regiment at a time, and bring both courage and discipline to our ranks! but your rabble ofstudent sympathizers are good for nothing."

"Success has not made you sanguine, my lord," said Morlache, smiling.

"I have little to be sanguine about," replied he, roughly. "They have not spoiled me with good fortune, and even on this very mission that I have come now, you'll see it is that Russian fellow will receive all the reward;

and if there be a decoration conferred, it is he, not I, will obtain it."

"And do you care for such baubles, my lord?" asked D'Esmonde, in affected surprise.

"We soldiers like these vanities as women do a new shawl, or your priests admire a smart new vestment, in which I have seen a fellow strut as proudly as any coxcomb in the ballet when he had completed his pirouette. As for myself," continued he, proudly, "I hold these stars and crosses cheaply enough. I'd mortgage my 'San Giuseppe' to-morrow if Morlache would give me twenty Naps. on it."

"The day of richer rewards is not distant, my lord," said D'Esmonde. "Lombardy will be our own ere the autumn closes, and then—and then——"

"And then we'll cut each other's throats for the booty, you were going to say," burst in Norwood; "but I'm not one of those who think so, abbé. My notion is that Austria is making a waiting race, and quietly leaving dissension to do amongst *us* what the snow did for the French at Moscow."

D'Esmonde's cheek grew pale at this shrewd surmise, but he quickly said,—

"You mistake them, my lord. The interests at stake are too heavy for such a critical policy; Austria dare not risk so hazardous a game."

"The wiseheads are beginning to suspect as much," said Norwood, "and certainly amongst the prisoners we have taken there is not a trait of despondency, nor even a doubt, as to the result of the campaign. The invariable reply to every question is, the Kaiser will have his own again—ay, and this even from the Hungarians. We captured a young fellow on the afternoon of Goito, who had escaped from prison, and actually broke his arrest to take his share in the battle. He was in what Austrians call Stockhaus arrest, and under sentence either of death, or imprisonment for life, for treason. Well, he got out somehow, and followed his regiment on foot till such time as one of his comrades was knocked over; then he mounted, and I promise you he knew his work in the saddle. Twice he charged a half-battery of twelves, and sabred our gunners where they stood; and when at last we pushed the Austrian column across the bridge, instead of retreating, as he might, he trusted to saving himself by the river. It was then his horse was shot under him, as he descended the bank, and over they both rolled into the stream. I assure you it was no easy matter to capture him even then, and we took him under a shower of balls from his comrades, that showed how little his life was deemed, in comparison with the opportunity of damaging us. When he was brought in, he was a pitiable object; his forehead was laid open from a sabre cut, his collar-bone and left arm broken by the fall, and a gunshot wound in the thigh, which the surgeon affirmed had every appearance of being received early in the action. He wouldn't tell us his name, or anything about his friends, for he wished to have written to them; the only words he ever uttered were a faint attempt at 'Hurrah for the Emperor!'"

"And this a Hungarian?" said D'Esmonde, in surprise.

"He might have been a Pole, or a Wallach, for anything I know; but he was a hussar, and as gallant a fellow as ever I saw."

"What was the uniform, my lord?" asked the abbé.

"Light blue, with a green chako—they call them the regiment of Prince Paul of Würtemberg."

"Tell me his probable age, my lord; and something of his appearance generally," said D'Esmonde, with increasing earnestness.

"His age I should guess to be two or three-and-twenty —not more certainly, and possibly even less than that. In height he is taller than I, but slighter. As to face, even with all his scars and bruises, he looked a handsome fellow, and had a clear blue eye that might have become an Englishman."

"You did not hear him speak?" asked the priest, with heightening curiosity.

"Except the few words I have mentioned, he never uttered a syllable. We learned that he had broken his arrest from one of his comrades; but the fellow, seeing our anxiety to hear more, immediately grew reserved, and would tell us nothing. I merely allude to the circumstance to show that the disaffection we trust to amongst the Hungarians is not universal; and even when they falter in their allegiance to the state, by some strange contradiction they preserve their loyalty to the 'Kaiser.'"

"I wish I could learn more about your prisoner, my lord," said the abbé, thoughtfully. "The story has interested me deeply."

"Midchekoff can, perhaps, tell you something, then, for he saw him later than I did. He accompanied the Duke of Genoa in an inspection of the prisoners just before we left the camp."

"And you said that he had a fair and Saxon-looking face?" said the abbé.

"Faith, I've told you all that I know of him," said Norwood, impatiently. "He was a brave soldier, and with ten thousand like him on our side, I'd feel far more at my ease for the result of this campaign than with the aid of those splendid squadrons they call the 'Speranza d'Italia.'"

"And the Crociati, my lord, what are *they* like?" said Morlache, smiling.

"A horde of robbers—a set of cowardly rascals, who have only courage for cruelty—the outpourings of gaols and offcasts of convents — degraded friars and escaped galley-slaves."

"My lord, my lord!" interrupted Morlache, suppressing his laughter with difficulty, and enjoying to the full this torrent of indignant anger. "You are surely not describing faithfully the soldiers of the Pope—the warriors whose banners have been blessed by the Holy Father?"

"Ask their General, Ferrari, whom they have three times attempted to murder. Ask *him* their character," said Norwood, passionately, "if D'Esmonde himself will not tell you."

"Has it not been the same in every land that ever struck a blow for liberty?" said the abbé. "Is it the statesman or the philosopher who have racked their brains and wasted their faculties in thought for the good of their fellow-men that have gone forth to battle? or is it not rather the host of unquiet spirits who infest every country, and who seek in change the prosperity that others pursue in patient industry? Some are enthusiastic for freedom—some, seek a field of personal distinction—some, are mere freebooters; but whatever they be, the cause remains the same."

"You may be right—for all I know you *are* right," said Norwood, doggedly; "but, for my own part, I have no fancy to fight shoulder to shoulder with cut-throats and housebreakers, even though the Church should have hallowed them with its blessing." Norwood arose as he said this, and walked impatiently up and down the chamber.

"When do you propose to return to the army, my lord?" said D'Esmonde, after a pause.

"I'm not sure—I don't even know if I shall return at all!" said Norwood, hastily. "I see little profit and less glory in the service! What say you, Morlache? Have they the kind of credit you would like to accept for a loan?"

"No, my lord," said the Jew, laughing; "Lombardy scrip would stand low in our market. I'd rather advance my moneys on the faith of your good friend the Lady Hester Onslow."

Norwood bit his lip and coloured, but made no reply.

"She has crossed into Switzerland, has she not?" asked D'Esmonde, carelessly.

"Gone to England!" said the viscount, briefly.

"When—how? I never heard of that," said the abbé. "I have put off writing to her from day to day, never suspecting that she was about to quit the continent."

"Nor did she herself, till about a week ago, when Sir Stafford took an equally unexpected departure for the other world——"

"Sir Stafford dead!—Lady Hester a widow!"

"Such is, I believe, the natural course of things for a woman to be when her husband dies."

"A rich widow, too, I presume, my lord?" said the abbé, with a quiet but subtle glance at Norwood.

"That is more than she knows herself at this moment, I fancy, for they say that Sir Stafford has involved his bequests with so many difficulties, and hampered them with such a mass of conditions, that whether she will be a millionnaire, or be actually poor, must depend upon the future. I can answer for one point, however, abbé," said he, sarcastically; "neither the Sacred College, nor the blessed brethren of the 'Pace,' are like to profit by the banker's economies."

"Indeed, my lord," said the abbé, slowly, while a sickly pallor came over his countenance.

"He has left a certain Doctor Grounsell his executor," continued Norwood; "and, from all that I can learn, no man has less taste for painted windows, stoles, or saints' shin-bones."

"Probably there may be other questions upon which he will prove equally obdurate," said the abbé, in a voice only audible to the viscount. "Is her ladyship at liberty to marry again?"

"I cannot, I grieve to say, give you any information on that point," said Norwood, growing deep red as he spoke.

"As your lordship is going to England——"

"I didn't say so. I don't remember that I told you that!" cried he, hastily.

"Pardon me if I made such a palpable mistake—but it ran in my head that you said something to that purport."

"It won't do, abbé!—it won't do," said Norwood, in a low whisper. "We, who have graduated at the 'Red House,' are just as wide awake as you of Louvain and St. Omer."

D'Esmonde looked at him with an expression of blank astonishment, and seemed as if he had not the most vague suspicion as to what the sarcasm referred.

"When can I have half an hour with you, Morlache?" said the viscount.

"Whenever it suits you, my lord. What say you to-morrow morning at eleven?"

"No, no! let it be later; I must have a ten hours' sleep after all this fatigue, and the sooner I begin the better."

"Where do you put up, my lord—at the Hôtel de l'Arno?" asked the abbé.

"No; I wish we were there with all my heart; but, to do us honour, they have given us quarters at the 'Crocetto,' that dreary asylum for stray archdukes and vagabond grand-duchesses, in the farthest end of the city. We are surrounded with chamberlains, aides-de-camp, and guards of honour. The only thing they have forgotten is a cook! So I'll come and dine here to-morrow."

"You do me great honour, my lord. I'm sure the Abbé D'Esmonde will favour us with his company also."

"If it be possible, I will," said the abbé. "Nothing but necessity would make me relinquish so agreeable a prospect."

"Well, till our next meeting," said the viscount, yawning, as he put on his hat. "It's too late to expect Midchekoff here to-night, and so good-bye. The streets are clear by this time, I trust."

"A shrewd fellow, too," said Morlache, looking after him.

"No, Morlache, not a bit of it!" said D'Esmonde. "Such intellects bear about the same proportion to really clever men as a good swordsman does to a first-rate operator in surgery. They handle a coarse weapon, and they deal with coarse antagonists. Employ them in a subtle negotiation, or a knotty problem, and you might as well ask a sergeant of the Blues to take up the femoral artery. Did you not remark a while ago that, for the sake of a sneer, he actually betrayed a secret about Sir Stafford Onslow's will?"

"And you believe all that to be true?"

"Of course I do. The only question is whether the Irish property, which, if I remember aright, was settled on Lady Hester at her marriage, can be fettered by any of these conditions? That alone amounts to some thousands a year, and would be a most grateful accession to those much-despised brethren his lordship alluded to."

"You can learn something about that point to-morrow when he dines here."

"He'll not be our guest to-morrow, Morlache. I must continue to occupy him for a day or two. He shall be invited to dine at court to-morrow—the request is a command—so that you will not see him. Receive Midchekoff if he calls, for I want to hear what he is about here—his money requirements will soon give us the clue. And I, too," said he, stretching and speaking languidly—"I, too, would be the better of some repose; it is now thirty-six hours, Morlache, since I closed my eyes in sleep. During that space I have written and dictated, and talked, and argued, urging on the lukewarm, restraining the rash, giving confidence to this one, preaching caution to that, and here I am, at the end of all, with my task as far as ever from completion. Events march faster than we, do what we will; and as the child never comes up with the hoop he has set in motion till it has fallen, so we rarely overtake the circumstances we have created till they have ceased to be of any value to us. Now, at this precise moment I want to be in the Vatican, at the camp of Goito, in the council-chamber at Schönbrunn—not to speak of a certain humble homestead in a far-away Irish county—and yet I have nothing for it but to go quietly off to bed, leaving to fortune—I believe that is as good a name for it as any other—the course of events, which, were I present, I could direct at will. Napoleon left a great example behind him; he beat his enemies always by rapidity. Believe me, Morlache, men think very much upon a par in this same world of ours, the great difference being that some take five minutes where others take five weeks: the man of minutes is sure to win."

Just as the abbé had spoken, Norwood returned, saying,—

"By the way, can either of you tell me if Jekyl is here now?"

"I have not seen him," said Morlache, "which is almost proof that he is not. His first visit is usually to me."

The streets were silent; a few stray lamps yet flickered over the spacious cupola of the Duomo, and a broken line of light faintly tracked one angle of the tower of the Piazza Vecchia; but except these last lingering signs of the late rejoicings, all Florence lay in darkness.

"How quiet is everything," said Morlache, as he took leave of his guests at his door. "The streets are empty already."

"Ay," muttered the abbé, "the rejoicing, like the victory, was but short-lived. Do our roads lie the same way, my lord?" asked he of Norwood.

"Very seldom, I suspect," replied the viscount, with a laugh. "*Mine* is in this direction."

"And *mine* lies this way," said D'Esmonde, bowing coldly, but courteously, as he passed on, and entered the narrow street beyond the bridge. "You are quite right, my lord," muttered he to himself; " our paths in life are very different. *Yours* may be wider and pleasanter, but *mine*, with all its turnings, goes straighter." He paused and listened for some seconds, till Norwood's steps had died away in the distance, and then turning back, he followed in the direction the other had taken.

Norwood walked rapidly along till he came to that small house on the Arno where Jekyl lived, and stopping in front of it, he threw a handful of sand against the window. To this signal, twice repeated, no reply was given to the viscount. He waited a few seconds, and then moved on. The abbé stood under the shadow of the tall palaces till the other was out of sight, and then, approaching the door, gave a long, low whistle. Within a few seconds the sash was opened, and Jekyl's voice heard,—

"It's you, abbé. There's the key. Will you excuse ceremony, and let yourself in?"

D'Esmonde opened the door at once, and, mounting the stairs, entered the little chamber in which now Jekyl stood in his dressing-gown and slippers, and, although suddenly roused from sleep, with a smile of courteous welcome on his diminutive features,—

"I paid no attention to your first signal, abbé," said he, scarcely thinking it could be you."

"Nor was it," said D'Esmonde, seating himself. "It was Lord Norwood, who doubtless must have had some important reason for disturbing you at this hour. I waited till he went off before I whistled. When did you arrive?"

"About three hours ago. I came from Lucerne, and was obliged to take such a zig-zag course, the roads being all blocked up by marching soldiers, guns, and waggons, that I have been eight days making the journey of three."

"So, Lady Hester is a widow! Strange, I only heard it an hour ago."

"The post has been interrupted, or you would have known it a week back. I wrote to you from Zurich. I accompanied her so far on her way to England, and was to have gone the whole way, too, but she determined to send me back here."

"Not to settle her affairs in Florence," said D'Esmonde, with a quiet slyness.

"Rather to look after Lord Norwood's," said Jekyl. "I never could exactly get to the bottom of the affair; but I suppose there must be some pledge or promise, which, in a rash moment, she has made him, and that already she repents of."

"How has she been left in the will?" asked D'Esmonde, abruptly.

"Her own words are, 'Infamously treated.' Except a bequest of ten thousand pounds, nothing beyond the Irish estate settled at the time of her marriage."

"She will easily get rid of Norwood, then," rejoined the abbé, with a smile. "His price is higher."

"I'm not so sure of that," broke in Jekyl; "the noble viscount's late speculations have all proved unfortunate—even to his book on Carlo Alberto. He thinks he has gone wrong in not hedging on Radetzky."

"What does he know of the changes of politics?" said D'Esmonde, contemptuously. "Let him stick to his stablemen and the crafty youths of Newmarket, but leave state affairs for other and very different capacities. Does she care for him, Jekyl? Does she love him?"

"She does, and she does not," said Jekyl, with a languishing air, which he sometimes assumed when asked for an opinion. "She likes his fashionable exterior, his easy kind of drawing-room assurance, and, perhaps not least of all, the tone of impertinent superiority he displays towards all other men; but she is afraid of him—afraid of his temper and his tyrannical humour, and terribly afraid of his extravagance."

"How amusing it is!" said D'Esmonde, with a yawn. "A minister quits the cabinet in disgust, and retires into private life for ever, when his first step is to plot his return to power; so your widow is invariably found weighing the thoughts of her mourning with speculations on a second husband. Why need she marry again; tell me that?"

"Because she is a widow, perhaps. I know no other reason," lisped out Jekyl.

"I cannot conceive a greater folly than that of these women, with ample fortune, sacrificing their independence by marriage. The whole world is their own, if they but knew it. They command every source of enjoyment while young, and have all the stereotyped solaces of old age when it comes upon them; and with poodles, parrots, and parasites, mornings of scandal and evenings of whist, eke out a very pretty existence."

"Dash the whole with a little religion, abbé," cried Jekyl, laughing, "and the picture will be tolerably correct."

"She shall not marry Lord Norwood; that, at least, I can answer for," said D'Esmonde, not heeding the other.

"It will be difficult to prevent it, abbé," said the other, dryly.

"Easier than you think for. Come, Master Jekyl, assume a serious mood for once, and pay attention to what I am about to say. This line of life you lead cannot go on for ever. Even were your own great gifts to resist time and its influences, a new generation will spring up with other wants and requirements, and another race will come who knew not Joseph. With all your versatility, it will be late to study new models, and acquire a new tongue. Have you speculated, then, I ask you, on this contingency?"

"I've some thoughts of a 'monkery,'" lisped out Jekyl; "if the good folk could only be persuaded to adopt a little cleanliness."

"Would not marriage suit you better; a rich widow—titled, well-connected, and good-looking—of fashionable habits, and tastes that resemble your own?"

"There are difficulties in the case," said Jekyl, calmly.

"State them," rejoined the abbé.

"To begin. There is Lady Hester herself—for, of course, you mean *her*."

"I engage to solve all on that head."

"Then there is the viscount."

"For him, too, I hold myself responsible."

"Lastly, there is Albert Jekyl, who, however admirably he understands garçon life, might discover that the husband was not among the range of his characters. As it is, my dear abbé, I lead a very pretty existence. I am neither bored nor tormented, I never quarrel with anybody, nor is the rudest man ever discourteous to *me*. I possess nothing that any one envies, except that heaven-born disposition to be pleased, of which nothing can rob me. I dine well, drive in rich equipages, and, if I liked, might ride the best horses; have at least a dozen Opera-boxes ready to receive me, and sweeter smiles to welcome me than would become me to boast of."

"Well, then, my proposal is, to give you all these on a life interest, instead of being a tenant-at-will," broke in D'Esmonde.

"And all this out of pure regard for me?" asked Jekyl, with a sly look.

"As a pure matter of bargain," replied D'Esmonde. "Lady Hester has advanced large sums to the cause in which I am interested. It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to repay them. We still want means, and that ten thousand pounds' legacy would render us immense service at this moment. Her income can well spare the sacrifice."

"Yes, yes," said Jekyl, musingly; and then looking fondly at his own image in the glass, he said, "I shall be a dead bargain after all."

D'Esmonde bit his lip to repress some movement of impatience, and after a pause said,—

"This matter does not admit of delay. Circumstances will soon require my presence in England, and with a strong sum at my command; besides——"

"If I understand you aright," said Jekyl, "you are to conduct the whole negotiations to a successful end, and that I shall have neither a bill to endorse, nor a duel to fight, throughout the affair."

"You shall be scathless."

"There is another point," said Jekyl, quickly. "How shall I figure in the newspapers—Albert Jekyl, Esquire, of where? Have you thought of that? I wish I had even an uncle a baronet."

"Pooh, pooh!" said D'Esmonde, impatiently. "You marry into the peerage—that's quite enough."

"Perhaps you're right," said Jekyl. "All that enumeration of family connection—'niece to the Chief Justice of Bembouk,'—or 'cousin-german to the Vice-Consul at Gumdalloo'—smacks terribly of 'Moses and Son.'"

"We are agreed, then," said the abbé, rising.

"I swear," said Jekyl, rising, and throwing out his hand in the attitude of the well-known picture of the "Marshals." "The step that I am about to take will throw its gloom over many a dinner-party, and bring sadness into many a *salon;* but I'll retire at least with dignity, and, like Napoleon, I'll write my memoirs."

"So far, then, so good," said D'Esmonde; "now, with your leave, I'll throw myself on this sofa and snatch an hour's sleep." And ere Jekyl had arranged the folds of what he called his "sable pelisse" as a covering, the abbé was in deep slumber.

CHAPTER XXV.

PRIESTCRAFT.

WITH less than two hours of sleep, D'Esmonde arose refreshed and ready for the day. Jekyl was not awake as the priest quitted his quarters, and, repairing to his own lodgings, dressed himself with more than usual care. Without any of the foppery of the abbé, there was a studied elegance in every detail of his costume, and as he stepped into the carriage which awaited him, many turned their looks of admiration at the handsome priest.

"To the Crocetto," said he, and away they went.

It was already so early that few persons were about as they drove into the court of the palace, and drew up at a private door. Here D'Esmonde got out and ascended the stairs.

"Ah, monsignore!" said a young man, somewhat smartly attired in a dressing-gown and velvet cap. "He did not return here last night."

"Indeed!" said the abbé, pondering.

"He dismissed the carriage at the Pitti, so that in all likelihood he passed the night at the palace."

"Most probably," said D'Esmonde, with a bland smile; and then, with a courteous "Good morning," he returned to his carriage.

"Where to, signore?" asked the driver.

"Towards the Duomo," said he. But scarcely had the man turned the second corner, than he said, "To the 'Moskova,' Prince Midchekoff's villa."

"We're turning our back to it, signore. It's on the hill of Fiesole."

D'Esmonde nodded, but said no more. Although scarcely a league from the city, the way occupied a considerable time, being one continued and steep ascent. The abbé was, however, too deeply engaged with his own thoughts to bestow attention on the pace they journeyed, or the scene around. He was far from being insensible to the influence of the picturesque or the beautiful; but now other and weightier considerations completely engrossed his mind, nor was he aware how the moments passed till the carriage came to a stop.

"The prince is absent, sir, in Lombardy," said a gruff-looking porter from within the gate.

D'Esmonde descended, and whispered some words between the bars.

"But my orders—my orders!" said the man, in a tone of deference.

"They would be peremptory against any other than *me*," said D'Esmonde, calmly; and, after a few seconds' pause, the man unlocked the gate, and the carriage passed in.

"To the back entrance," called out D'Esmonde. And they drove into a spacious courtyard, where a number of men were engaged in washing carriages, cleaning horses, and all the other duties of the stable. One large and cumbrous vehicle, loaded with all the varied "accessories" of the road, and fortified by many a precaution against the accidents of the way, stood prominent. It was covered with stains and splashes, and bore unmistakable evidence of a long journey. A courier, with a red-brown beard descending to his breast, was busy in locking and unlocking the boxes, as if in search of some missing article.

"How heavy the roads are in the north!" said D'Esmonde, addressing him in German.

The man touched his cap in a half-sullen civility, and muttered an assent.

"I once made the same journey myself, in winter," resumed the abbé, "and I remembered thinking that no man undergoes such real hardship as a courier. Sixteen, seventeen, ay, twenty days and nights of continued exposure to cold and snows, and yet obliged to have all his faculties on full stretch the whole time, to remember every post station, every bridge and ferry—the steep mountain passes, where oxen must be hired—the frontiers of provinces, where passports are viséd."

"Ay, and when the lazy officials will keep you standing in the deep snow a full hour at midnight, while they ring every copeck to see it be good money."

"That's the true and only metal for a coinage," said D'Esmonde, as he drew forth a gold Napoleon, and placed it in the other's hand. "Take it, my worthy fellow," said he, "it's part of a debt I owe to every man who wears the courier's jacket. Had it not been for one of *your* cloth, I'd have been drowned at the ford of Ostrovitsch."

"It's the worst ferry in the empire," said the courier. "The Emperor himself had a narrow escape there. The raft is one-half too small."

"How many days have you taken on the way?" asked D'Esmonde, carelessly.

"Twenty-eight—yesterday would have made the twenty-ninth—but we arrived before noon."

"Twenty-eight days!" repeated D'Esmonde, pondering.

"Ay, and nights too! But remember that Vradskoi Notski is three hundred and eighty versts below St. Petersburg."

"I know it well," said D'Esmonde, "and with a heavily loaded carriage it's a weary road. How did she bear the journey?" said he, in a low, scarcely uttered whisper.

"Bear it!—better than I did; and, except when scolding the postilions for not going twelve versts an hour, in deep snow, she enjoyed herself the entire way."

D'Esmonde gave a knowing look and a smile, as though to say that he recognized her thoroughly in the description.

"You know her, then?" asked the courier.

"This many a year," replied the abbé, with a faint sigh.

"She's a rare one," said the man, who grew at each instant more confidential, "and thinks no more of a gold rouble than many another would of a copeck. Is it true, as they say, she was once an actress?"

"There are stranger stories than that about her," said D'Esmonde. "But why has she come alone? How happens it that she is here?"

"That is the secret that none of us can fathom," said the courier. "We thought there was to have been another, and I believe there is another in the passport, but it was no affair of mine. I had my orders from the prince's own 'intendant,' who bespoke all the relays for the road, and here we are."

"I will explain all the mystery to you at another time, courier," said D'Esmonde; "meanwhile, let nothing of what we have been saying escape you. By the way," added he, half carelessly, "what name did she travel under?"

"The passport was made out 'Die Gräfin von Dalton;' but she has a Spanish name, for I heard it once from the intendant."

"Was it Lola de Seviglia?"

"That was it. I remember it well."

"We are very old friends indeed!" said the abbé; "and now be cautious; let none know that we have spoken together, and I can serve your fortune hereafter."

The German scarcely looked quite satisfied with himself for the confidence he had been unwittingly led into; but, after all," thought he, "the priest knew more than I could tell him;" and so he resumed his search without further thought of the matter.

As for D'Esmonde, his first care was to inquire for Monsieur de Grasse, the prince's chief secretary, with whom he remained closeted for nigh an hour. It will not be necessary to inflict all the detail of that interview on the reader; enough that we state its substance to have been a pressing entreaty on the part of D'Esmonde to be admitted to an audience of the prince, as firmly resisted by the secretary, whose orders were not to admit any one, nor, indeed, acknowledge that his highness was then there.

"You must wait upon him at the Crocetto, monsignore," said De Grasse. "Your presence here will simply cause the dismissal of those who have admitted you, and yet never advance your own wishes in the least."

"My business is too urgent, sir, to be combated by reasons so weak as these," replied D'Esmonde; "nor am I much accustomed to the air of an ante chamber."

"You must yet be aware, monsignore, that the orders of Prince Midchekoff are absolute in his own house." The secretary dropped his voice almost to a whisper as he finished this sentence, for he had just overheard the prince speaking to some one without, and could detect his step as he came along the corridor.

With a look of most meaning entreaty he besought the abbé to keep silence, while he crept noiselessly over and turned the key. D'Esmonde uttered an exclamation of anger, and, sweeping past a window, within which stood a magnificent vase of malachite, he caught the costly object in the wide folds of his gown, and dashed it to the ground in a thousand pieces. De Grasse gave a sudden cry of horror, and at the same instant Midchekoff knocked at the door, and demanded admittance. With faltering hand the secretary turned the key, and the prince entered the room, casting his eyes from D'Esmonde to the floor, where the fragments lay, and back again to the priest, with a significance that showed how he interpreted the whole incident. As for the abbé, he looked as coldly indifferent to the accident as though it were the veriest trifle he had destroyed.

"I came to have a few moments' interview with you, prince," said he, calmly; "can you so far oblige me?"

"I am entirely at your orders, monsignore," said the Russian, with a faint smile. "Allow me to conduct you to a chamber in less disorder than this one."

The abbé bowed and followed him, not seeming to hear the allusion. And now, passing through a number of rooms, whose gorgeous furniture was carefully covered, they reached a small chamber opening upon a conservatory, where a breakfast-table was already spread.

"I will waste neither your time nor my own, prince, by an apology for the hour of this visit, nor the place; my business did not admit of delay—that will excuse me in your eyes."

The prince gave a cold bow, but never spoke.

D'Esmonde resumed. "I have heard the news from the camp: Lord Norwood tells me that the Austrians have fallen back, and with a heavy loss, too."

"Not heavy!" said the Russian, with a smile.

"Enough, however, to raise the hopes and strengthen the courage of the others. Goito was, at least, a victory." A faint shrug of the shoulders was the only reply the prince made, and the abbé went on: "Things are too critical, prince, to treat the event slightingly. We cannot answer either for France or England; still less can we rely on the politicians of Vienna. A second or a third reverse, and who can say that they will not treat for a peace, at the cost of half the states of Lombardy. Nay, sir, I am not speaking without book," added he, more warmly; "I know—I repeat it—I know that such a negotiation has been entertained, and that, at this moment, the cabinet of England has the matter in its consideration."

"It may be so," said the prince, carelessly, as he poured out his coffee.

"Then there is not a moment to be lost," cried the abbé, impetuously. "A cession of the Milanais means a Republic of Upper Italy—the downfall of the Popedom—the rule of infidelity over the Peninsula. Are *we*—are *you* prepared for this? Enough has been done to show that Italian 'unity' is a fiction. Let us complete the lesson by proving that they cannot meet the Austrian in arms. The present generation, at least, will not forget the chastisement, if it be but heavy enough."

"We may leave that task to the Imperialists," said the prince, with a cold smile.

"I do not think so. I know too much of German sluggishness and apathy. The reinforcements, that should pour in like a flood, creep lazily along. The dread of France—the old terror of those wars that once crushed them—is still uppermost. They know not how far Europe will permit them to punish a rebellious province; and, while they hesitate, they give time for the growth of that public opinion that will condemn them."

"Perhaps you are right," said the Russian, as he sipped his coffee carelessly.

"And if I be," cried D'Esmonde, passionately, "are we to sit tranquilly here till the ruin overtake us? Will Russia wait till the flame of a red republic throws its lurid glare over Europe, and even gleam over the cold waters of the Neva? Is it her wish, or to her benefit, that the flag of the democrat and the infidel is to float over the continent?"

"You conjured up the monster yourself, monsignore. It is for you to order him back to the depths he came from."

"And we are ready for the task," said the priest. "We fostered this revolt, because we saw it was better to lop off a diseased limb than to suffer the gangrene to spread over the entire body; better to cast down into utter perdition the wild democrats, who but half believed us, than peril the countless millions of true Catholics. Nay, more, we acted with your counsel and concurrence. That revolt has already borne its fruits. Men see no issue to the struggle they are engaged in. The men of moderation are overborne by the wild clamour of the factionist. Anarchy is amongst them, and now is our moment to bid the contest cease, and earn from mankind the glorious epithet of 'peacemaker.' The tide of victory once turned, see how the mind of Europe will turn with it. Good wishes are prone to go with the battalions that advance!"

"Good wishes are not too costly a sympathy," said the Russian, coolly.

"It is to that point I am coming, prince," said the abbé; "nor have I intruded myself on your privacy today merely to discuss the public opinion of Europe. The whole of this question lies in a narrow compass. It is time that this struggle should cease—it is, at least, time that the tide of conquest should turn. Were Austria free to use her strength, we might trust the issue to herself; but she is not, and we must help her. I hold here the means," said he, placing on the table a heavy pocket-book crammed with letters. "This," said he, taking up one large sealed packet, "is an autograph from his Holiness, commanding Durando to halt at the Po, and under no circumstances to cross the frontier. This," continued he, showing another, "is to Ghirardi, to grant leave of absence to all officers who desire to return to their homes. This is to Krasaletzki, to provide for the disbandment of his legion. The King of Naples waits but for the signal to recall General Pepe and his contingent, fifteen thousand strong. And now, prince, there is but one other voice in Europe we wait for—the Czar's!"

"His imperial majesty has ever wished well to the cause of order," said the Russian, with a studied calm of manner.

"Away with such trifling as this!" said D'Esmonde, passionately; "nor do not try to impose on me by those courteous generalities that amuse cabinets. Russia speaks to Western Europe best by her gold. The 'rouble' can come where the 'Cossack' cannot! There are men with those armies that comprehend no other argument—whose swords have their price. Our treasures are exhausted; the sacred vessels of our altars—the golden ornaments of our shrines—are gone. You alone can aid us at this moment. It is no barren generosity, prince! You are combating your Poles more cheaply beside the Po and the Adige than on the banks of the Vistula! You are doing more! You are breaking up those ancient alliances of Europe whose existence excluded you from continental power! You are buying your freedom to sit down among the rulers of the Old World, and accustoming the nations of the West to the voice of the Boyard in their councils! And, greatest of all, you are crushing into annihilation that spirit of revolt that now rages like a pestilence. But why do I speak of these things to one like you? You know full well the terms of the compact. Your own handwriting has confessed it."

Midchekoff gave a slight—a very slight—movement of surprise, but never spoke.

"Yes," continued D'Esmonde, "I have within that pocket-book at this moment the receipt of Count Grünenburg, the Austrian Secretary-at-War, for the second instalment of a loan advanced by Prince Midchekoff to the imperial Government. I have a copy of the order in council acknowledging in terms of gratitude the aid, and recommending that the cross of St. Stephen should be conferred on the illustrious lender. And, less gracious than these," added he, with sarcastic bitterness, "I have the record of the Emperor's scruples about according the first-class order of the empire to one whose nobility was but left-handed. Were these to appear to-morrow in the *Razionale*, is it only your pride as a prince that would be humbled? Or, think you, that a single stone would rest upon another in this gorgeous edifice where we are standing? Who or what could restrain an infuriated populace from wreaking their vengeance on the traitor? Who would lift a hand against the pillage of this splendour, and the desecration of this magnificence? It is not willingly that I tell you these things, nor had I ever spoken of them if you had but heard me with fitting attention. I know, too, the price at which they are uttered. We never can be friends: but that is of small moment. Our cause—ours, I say—for it is yours no less than mine—is above such consideration."

"How much do you require?" said Midchekoff, as he leaned his arm on the chimney-piece, and stared calmly at the abbé.

"Ghirardi and his staff demand two hundred thousand francs; Albizi will be a cheaper bargain. Marionetti and his force will be surrounded, and retire from Lombardy on parole of not serving during the campaign—he only asks enough to emigrate with. Then, there is the Commissary of the Crociati—he is quite ready to become his own paymaster. There are others of inferior rank and pretensions, with whom I shall treat personally. The press, particularly of England, will be the difficulty; but its importance is above all price. The public mind must be brought back, from its sympathy for a people, to regard the rulers more favourably. Anarchy and misrule must be displayed in their most glaring colours. The Crociati will do us good service here; their crimes would sully a holier crusade than this! But I weary you, sir," said the abbé, stopping suddenly, and observing that Midchekoff, instead of seeming to listen, was busily occupied in writing.

"Morlache holds bills of mine to this amount," said the prince, showing a list of several large sums; "he will place them at your disposal on your giving a receipt for them. This is an order, also, regarding certain emeralds I have commissioned him to have mounted in gold. He need not do so, but will dispose of the gems, as I shall not want them." A very slight flush here coloured his cheek, and he paused as if some bitter thought had crossed his mind.

D'Esmonde's quick eye read the meaning of the expression, and he said, "Am I to congratulate your highness on the approach of a certain happy event?"

"His majesty has not deigned to accord me the necessary permission," was the reply.

"Then I will be bold enough to say I congratulate you," cried D'Esmonde. "Your alliance should be with a royal house, prince. *Your* position in Europe is exceptional; such should be *your* marriage. Besides, the day is not very distant when there must come another dissection of the map of Europe. There will be new principalities, but wanting heads to rule them. The world is tired of Coburgs, and would gladly see another name amongst its royalties."

"I am at the disposal of my Emperor," said Midchekoff, coldly; for whatever effect the flatteries might produce within, neither his words nor his looks would betray it, and now by his manner he showed that he wished the interview over.

"Mademoiselle, then, returns to her family?" asked D'Esmonde.

"To the care of the Count von Auersberg."

"The reputation of having attracted your highness will be a fortune to her."

"She has refused a settlement of eighty thousand roubles a year."

"A most princely offer!" cried D'Esmonde.

"His majesty fixed the sum," said Midchekoff, as coolly as though talking of an indifferent matter.

D'Esmonde now rose to take his leave, but there was a reluctance in his manner that showed he was unwilling to go. At last he said, "Does your highness intend to return to the camp?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"I ask," said the abbé, "inasmuch as I am hourly in expectation of hearing from Cardinal Maraffa, with reference to a certain decoration, which you should long since have received——"

"Indeed! has his Holiness been pleased to consider me amongst his most ardent well-wishers?" cried the prince, interrupting.

"I may be in a position to assure your highness on that score before another day elapses. May I hope that you will receive me—even at some inconvenience—for my time is much occupied just now?"

"Whenever you call, Monsieur l'Abbé," was the prompt reply. "If you will deign to accept this ring as a souvenir of me, it will also serve to admit you at all hours, and in all places, to me."

"Your costly gift, prince," said D'Esmonde, flushing "has a greater value in my eyes than all its lustre can express." And with a most affectionate leave-taking, they parted.

"At what hour is the prince's carriage ordered?" said the abbé, as he passed through the hall.

"For two o'clock precisely, monsignore. He is to have an audience at the Pitti."

"To Florence—and with speed!" said D'Esmonde to his coachman; and away they drove.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE "MOSKOVA."

The Abbé D'Esmonde passed a busy morning. Twice was he closeted with the President of the Ministry, and once was he received in a lengthy audience at the "Pitti;" after which he repaired to the house of Morlache, where he remained till after two o'clock.

"There goes Midchekoff to the palace!" said the Jew, as a handsome equipage drove past.

"Then it is time for me to be away," said D'Esmonde, rising. "I have received orders to meet him there. Remember, Morlache, I must have this sum in gold, ready by the evening—the bills on London can reach me by post."

"All shall be attended to," said Morlache; and the abbé entered his carriage once more, giving orders for the Pitti.

When the carriage had passed the first turning, however, D'Esmonde appeared to have remembered something that till then had escaped him, and he desired the man to drive round to the San Gallo gate; thence he directed his way to the narrow road which traverses the valley of the Mugello, and winds along for miles at the foot of the hill of Fiesole. Once outside the city, D'Esmonde urged the man to speed, and they drove for nigh an hour at a rapid pace.

"There is a footpath somewhere hereabouts leads to Fiesole," said D'Esmonde, springing out, and casting his eyes around. "I have it. Remain here till I come down. I may be absent for an hour or more; but be sure to wait for me." And so saying, he passed into a vineyard beside the road, and was soon lost to view.

The pathway was steep and rugged; but D'Esmonde traversed it with an active step, scarcely seeming to bestow a thought upon its difficulties, in the deeper preoccupation of his mind. As little did he notice the peasant greetings that met him, or hear the kindly accents that bade him "good day" as he went. If at intervals he stopped in his career, it was rather to take breath, and to recruit vigour for new efforts, than to look down upon the gorgeous scene that now lay beneath him. For an instant, however, his thoughts did stray to the objects in view, and as he beheld the dark towers of a gloomy castellated building, half hid amongst tall yew-trees, he muttered,—

"Deeper and darker schemes than mine were once enacted there!—and what fruits have they borne after all? They who convulsed the age they lived in have never left an impress to ruffle the future, and, for aught that we know or feel, the Medici might never have lived. And this," cried he, aloud, "because theirs was a selfish ambition. There is but one cause whose interests are eternal—the Church—that glorious creation which combines power here with triumph hereafter!"

His face, as he uttered the words, was no bad emblem of the nature within: a high and noble brow, lit up by the impress of a great ambition, and, beneath, eyes of changeful and treacherous meaning; while, lower down again, in the compressed lips and projecting chin, might be read the signs of an unrelenting spirit.

Passing along through many a tortuous path, he at last reached a small private gate, which led into the grounds of the "Moskova." He had to bethink him for a moment of the way which conducted to the gardens, but he soon remembered the direction, and walked on. It was the hour when in Italy the whole face of a country—the busiest streets of a thronged city—are deserted, and a stillness far more unbroken than that of midnight prevails. The glowing hours of noonday had brought the "siesta," and not a labourer was to be seen in the fields.

D'Esmonde found the garden unlocked, and entered. He knew that, by passing directly onward to the "orangery," he could enter the villa by a small door, which led into the private apartments of the prince. This was, however, locked, but the window lay open, and with a spring he gained the sill, and entered the chamber. He knew it well; it was the little room appropriated by

Midchekoff as his private library, simply furnished, and connected with a still smaller chamber, where, in an alcove, a species of divan stood, on which it was the rich man's caprice at times to pass the night. Although certain traces showed that the prince had been recently there, no letters nor papers lay about; there was no sign of haste or negligence, nor was anything left to the accidents of prying eyes or meddling fingers. D'Esmonde opened the door which conducted into the corridor, and listened; but all was silent. He then sat down to think. The palace—for such, under the name of villa, it was—was of immense extent, and he could not expect to ramble many minutes without chancing upon some of the household. His colour came and went, as, in deep agitation, he conceived in turn every possible project, for he was one whose mind worked with all the violent throes of some mighty engine; and even when taking counsel with himself, the alternate impulses of his reason became painful efforts. At last he made up his resolve, and, entering the inner chamber, he closed the shutters, and drew the curtains, and then, throwing around his shoulders a richly-lined cloak of sable, he rang the bell loudly and violently. This done, he lay down upon the divan, which, in the darkness of the recess, was in complete obscurity. He had barely time to draw the folds of the mantle about him, when a servant entered, with noiseless step, and stood at a respectful distance, awaiting what he believed to be his master's orders.

"Send the signora," muttered D'Esmonde, with the cloak folded across his mouth, and then turned on his side. The servant bowed and retired.

D'Esmonde started up, and listened to the retiring footfalls, 'till they were lost in distance, and then the strong pulsations of his own heart seemed to mock their measured pace. "Would the stratagem succeed?" "Would she come, and come alone?" were the questions which he asked himself, as his clasped hands were clenched, and his lips quivered in strong emotion. An unbroken stillness succeeded, so long that, to his aching senses, it seemed like hours of time. At last a heavy door was heard to bang—another, too—now voices might be detected in the distance; then came footsteps, it seemed, as of several people; and, lastly, these died away, and he could mark the sweeping sounds of a female dress coming rapidly along the corridor. The door opened and closed—she was in the library, and appeared to be waiting. D'Esmonde gave a low, faint cough, and now, hastily passing on, she entered the inner chamber, and, with cautious steps traversing the darkened space, she knelt down beside the couch. D'Esmonde's hand lay half uncovered, and on this now another hand was gently laid. Not a word was uttered by either; indeed, their very breathings seemed hushed into stillness.

If the secrets of hearts were open to us, what a history, what a life-long experience lay in those brief moments! and what a conflict of passion might be read in those two natures! A slight shudder shook D'Esmonde's frame at the touch of that hand, which so often had been clasped within his own, long, long ago, and he raised it tenderly, and pressed it to his lips. Then, passing his other arm around her, so as to prevent escape, he said, but in a voice barely audible, the one word "Lola!"

With a violent effort she tried to disengage herself from his grasp; and although her struggles were great, not a cry, not a syllable escaped her.

"Hear me, Lola," said D'Esmonde; "hear me with patience and with calm, if not for my sake, for your own."

"Unhand me, then," said she, in a voice which, though low, was uttered with all the vehemence of strong emotion. "I am not a prisoner beneath this roof."

"Not a prisoner, say you?" said D'Esmonde, as he locked the door, and advanced towards her. "Can there be any bondage compared to this? Does the world know of any slavery so debasing?"

"Dare to utter such words again, and I will call to my aid those who will hurl you from that window," said she, in the same subdued accents. "That priestly robe will be but a poor defence, here."

"You'd scarcely benefit by the call, Lola," said D'Esmonde, as he stole one hand within the folds of his robe.

"Would you kill me?" cried she, growing deathly pale.

"Be calm, and hear me," said the priest, as he pressed her down upon a seat, and took one directly opposite to her. "It never could be my purpose, Lola, to have come here either to injure or revile you. I may, indeed, sorrow over the fall of one whose honourable ambitions might have soared so high—I may grieve for a ruin that was so causeless—but, save when anguish may wring from me a word of bitterness, I will not hurt your ears, Lola. I know everything—all that has happened—yet have I to learn who counselled you to this flight."

"Here was my adviser—here!" said she, pressing her hand firmly against her side. "My heart, bursting and indignant—my slighted affection—my rejected love! You ask me this—*you*, who knew how I loved him."

For some seconds her emotion overcame her, and, as she covered her face with her hands, she swayed and rocked from side to side, like one in acute bodily pain.

"I stooped to tell him all—how I had thought and dreamed of him—how followed his footsteps—sought out the haunts that he frequented—and loved to linger in the places where he had been. I told him, too, of one night when I had even ventured to seek him in his own chamber, and was nearly detected by another who chanced to be there; my very dress was torn in my flight. There was no confession too humiliating for my lips to utter, nor my pen to trace; and what has been the return? But why do I speak of these things to one whose heart is sealed against affection, and whose nature rejects the very name of love? You will be a merciless judge, Eustace!"

"Go on; let me hear you out, Lola," said the priest, gently.

"The tale is soon told," rejoined she, hurriedly. "My letter reached him on the eve of a great battle. The army, it appears, had been marching for weeks, and suddenly came upon the enemy without expecting it. He told me so much in about as many words, and said that he was passing what might, perhaps, prove his last hours of life in replying to me. 'Outnumbered and outmanœuvred, nothing remains but to sell our lives dearly, and even in our defeat make the name of Englishmen one of terror to our enemies.' So he wrote, and so I could have read, with a swelling, but not a breaking heart, had he not added that, for my warm affection, my whole soul's devotion, he had nothing but his friendship to give in return—that his heart had long since been another's, and that, although she never could be his—never in all likelihood know of his affection—he would die with her name upon his lips, her image in his heart. 'It matters little,' added he, 'in what channel flow the feelings of one, where to-morrow, in all likelihood, the course will be dried up for ever. Let me, however, with what may be the last lines I shall ever write, thank you—nay, bless you—for one passage of your letter, and the thought of which will nerve my heart in the conflict now so near, and make me meet my last hour with an unbroken spirit.' The mystery of these words I never could penetrate, nor have I the slightest clue to their meaning. But why should I care for them? Enough that I am slighted, despised, and rejected! This letter came to my hands six weeks ago. I at once wrote to the Prince Midchekoff, telling him that the woman he was about to marry loved, and was loved by, another; that she entertained no feeling towards himself but of dread and terror. I told him, too, that her very beauty would not withstand the inroads of a sorrow that was corroding her heart. He replied to me, and I wrote again. I was now his confidante, and he told me all—how that he had addressed a formal demand to the Emperor for leave to marry, and how he had taken safe measures to have his prayer rejected. Then came the tidings of the Czar's refusal to Madame de Heidendorf, and *my* triumph; for I told her, and to her face, that, once more, we were equals. It was, stung by this taunt, that she refused to travel with me—refused to accept the splendid dowry to which her betrothal entitled her, and demanded to be restored to her family and friends, poor as she had left them. It was then that I resolved on this bold step. I had long been learning the falsehood of what are called friends, and how he who would achieve fortune must trust to himself alone. Midchekoff might not love me, but there was much in my power to secure his esteem. My head could be as fertile in schemes as his own. I had seen much and heard more. The petty plottings of the Heidendorf, and the darker counsels of the Abbé D'Esmonde, were all known to me——"

"You did not dare to write my name?" asked the priest, in a slow, deliberate voice.

"And why should I not?" cried she, haughtily. "Is it fear, or is it gratitude should hold my hand?"

"You forget the past, Lola, or you had never said these words."

"I remember it but as a troubled dream, which I will not suffer to darken my waking hours. At last I begin to live, and never till now have I known the sensation of being above fear."

"You told the prince, then, of our relations together? You showed him my letters and your own replies?" said D'Esmonde, as he fixed his dark eyes upon her.

"All—all!" said she, with a haughty smile.

"You, perhaps, told him that I had engaged you to write to me of all you heard or saw at St. Petersburg?"

"I said so, in a most unpolished phrase: I called myself a spy."

"You were probably not less candid when designating your friends, Lola," said D'Esmonde, with a faint smile. "How, pray, did you name *me?*"

"It was a better word—one of cutting reproach, believe me," said she. "I called you a 'priest,' sir: do you think there is another epithet that can contain as much?"

"In the overflowing of those frank impulses, Lola, of course you spoke of Norwood—of Gerald Acton, I mean, as you may remember him better by that name; you told the prince of your marriage to this Englishman—a marriage solemnized by myself, and of which I retain the written evidence."

"With the falsehood that for a brief moment imposed upon myself, I would not stoop to cheat another! No, Eustace, this may be priestcraft. To outlive a deception, and then employ it; to tremble at a fallacy first, and to terrorize by means of it after, is excellent Popery, but most sorry womanhood!"

"Unhappy, wretched creature!" cried D'Esmonde; "where have you learned these lessons?—who could have taught you this?"

"You—and you alone, Eustace. In reading *your* nature, I unread my own faith. In seeing your falsehood, I learned to believe there was no truth anywhere. I asked myself, what must be the religion if this man be its interpreter?"

"Hold—hold!" cried D'Esmonde, passionately. "It is not to such as you I can render account of my actions, nor lay bare the secret workings of my heart. Know this much, however, woman, and ponder over it well, that if a man like me can make shipwreck of his whole nature, crush his hopes, and blast his budding affections, the cause that exacts the sacrifice must needs be holy. Bethink you that my goal is not like *yours*. I have not plotted for a life of inglorious ease. I have not schemed to win a pampered and voluptuous existence. It is not in a whirlwind of passionate enjoyment I have placed the haven of my hopes. You see me—as I have ever been—poor, meanly housed, and meanly fed,—not repining at my lot either, not deeming my condition a hard one. Why am I thus, then? Are the prizes that worldly men contend for above *my* reach? Am I the inferior of those who are carrying away the great rewards of life? Where is the stain of falsehood in all this?"

"Were I to copy the picture and paint myself in the same colours," said Lola,—"were I to show what I have stooped to—a scoff and a shame!—how I neither faltered at a crime nor trembled before exposure—all that I might be—what I now am——"

"The mistress of a prince!" said D'Esmonde, with a contemptuous smile.

"Was it a prouder fortune when my lover was the serge-clad seminarist of Salamanca?" said she, laughing scornfully.

"I linked you with a higher destiny, Lola," said D'Esmonde, deliberately.

"Again you refer to this pretended marriage; but I put no faith in your words; nor, were they even true, should they turn me from my path."

"At least you should confirm your claim to his name and title," said D'Esmonde. "The rank you will thus attain will but strengthen your position in the world; and they who would treat contemptuously the Toridor's daughter will show every courtesy and deference to the English peeress."

"I will hazard nothing on your advice, priest!" said she, proudly. "I know you as one who never counselled without a scheme of personal advantage. This Acton has injured you. You desire his ruin; or, perhaps, some deep intrigue awaits myself. It matters not: I will not aid you."

"How you misjudge me, Lola!" said he, sorrowfully. "I meant by this act to have repaired many an unconscious wrong, and to have vindicated an affection which the troubled years of life have never been able to efface. Amidst all the cares of great events, when moments are precious as days of ordinary existence, I have come to offer you this last reparation. Think well ere you reject it."

"Not for an instant!" cried she, passionately. "Make weaker minds the tools of your subtle artifices, and leave *me* to follow my own career."

"I will obey you," said D'Esmonde, with an air of deep humility. "I ask but one favour. As this meeting is unknown to all, never speak of it to Midchekoff. My name need never pass your lips, nor shall my presence again offend you. Adieu for ever!"

Whether some passing pang of remorse shot through her heart, or that a sudden sense of dread came across her, Lola stood unable to reply, and it was only as he moved away towards the door that she found strength to say, "Good-bye."

"Let me touch that hand for the last time, Lola," said he, advancing towards her.

"No, no—leave me!" cried she, with a sick shudder, and as though his very approach suggested peril.

D'Esmonde bowed submissively, and passed out. With slow and measured steps he traversed the alleys of the garden; but once outside the walls, he hastened his pace; descending the mountain with rapid strides, he gained the road where the carriage waited in less than half an hour.

"To the city!" said he; and, throwing himself back in his seat, drew down the blinds, while, with folded arms and closed eyes, he tasted of, what habit enabled him at any moment to command, a refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XXVII.

VALEGGIO.

The little village of Valeggio, near the Lago di Guarda, was fixed upon as the spot where the commissaries of both armies should meet to arrange on the exchange of prisoners. It stood at about an equal distance from their head-quarters, and, although a poor and insignificant hamlet, was conveniently situated for the purpose in hand. Soon after daybreak, the stirring sounds of marching troops awoke the inhabitants, and a half-squadron of Piedmontese lancers were seen to ride up the narrow street, and, dismounting, to picket their horses in the little Piazza of the market. Shortly after these came an equal number of Hungarian hussars, "Radetzky's Own," who drew up in the square before the church; each party seeming carefully to avoid even a momentary contact with the other. Several country carts and waggons lined the street, for a number of prisoners had arrived the preceding evening, and taken up their quarters in the village, who might now be seen projecting their pale faces and bandaged heads from many a casement, and watching with eager curiosity all that was going forward. About an hour later, an Austrian general, with his staff, rode in from the Peschiera road, while, almost at the very instant, a calèche with four horses dashed up from the opposite direction, conveying the Piedmontese "Commissary."

So accurately timed was the arrival, that they both drew up at the door of the little inn together, and as the one dismounted, the other alighted from his carriage.

The etiquette of precedence, so easily settled in the ordinary course of events, becomes a matter of some difficulty at certain moments, and so the two generals seemed to feel it, as, while desirous of showing courtesy, each scrupled at what might seem a compromise of his country's dignity. The Austrian officer was a very old man, whose soldierlike air and dignified deportment recalled the warriors of a past century. The other, who was slighter and younger, exhibited an air of easy unconcern, rather smacking of courts than camps, and vouching for a greater familiarity with *salons* than with soldier life.

They uncovered and bowed respectfully to each other, and then stood, each waiting, as it were, for the initiative of the other.

"After you, general," said the younger, at length, and with a manner which most courteously expressed the deference he felt for age.

"I must beg *you* to go first, sir," replied the Austrian. "I stand here on the territory of my master, and I see in you all that demands the deference due to a guest."

The other smiled slightly, but obeyed without a word; and, ascending the stairs, was followed by the old general into the little chamber destined for their conference. Slight and trivial as this incident was, it is worth mention, as indicating the whole tone of the interview—one characterized by a proud insistance on one side, and a certain plastic deference on the other. The Austrian spoke like one who felt authorized to dictate his terms; while the Piedmontese seemed ready to acquiesce in and accept whatever was proffered. The letters which accredited them to each other lay open on the table; but as this preliminary conversation had not assumed the formal tone of business, neither seemed to know the name or title of the other. In fact, it appeared like a part of the necessary etiquette that they were simply to regard each other as representatives of two powers, neither caring to know or recognize any personal claims.

Lists of names were produced on both sides. Muster-rolls of regiments, showing the precise ranks of individuals, and their standing in the service, all arranged with such care and accuracy as to show that the conference itself was little more than a formality. A case of brevet-rank, or the accident of a staff appointment, might now and then call for a remark or an explanation, but, except at these times, the matter went on in a mere routine fashion; a mark of a pencil sufficing to break a captivity, and change the whole fate of a fellow-man!

"Our task is soon ended, sir," said the Austrian, rising at last. "It would seem that officers on both sides prefer death to captivity in this war."

"The loss has been very great indeed," said the other. "The peculiar uniform of your officers, so distinct from their men, has much exposed them."

"They met their fate honourably, at least, sir; they wore the colours of their Emperor."

"Very true, general," replied the other, "and I will own to you our surprise at the fact that there have been no desertions, except from the ranks. The popular impression was, that many of the Hungarians would have joined the Italian cause. It was even said whole regiments would have gone over."

"It was a base calumny upon a faithful people and a brave soldiery," said the other. "I will not say that such a falsehood may not have blinded their eyes against their truth in their national struggle—the love of country might easily have been used to a base and treacherous purpose—but here, in this conflict, not a man will desert the cause of the Emperor!" The emotion in which he spoke these words was such that he was obliged to turn away his face to conceal it.

"Your words have found an illustration amongst the number of our wounded prisoners, general," said the other—"a young fellow who, it was said, broke his arrest to join the struggle at Goito, but whose name or rank we never could find out, for, before being taken, he had torn every mark of his grade from cuff and collar!"

"You know his regiment, perhaps?"

"It is said to be Prince Paul of Würtemberg's."

"What is he like—what may be his age?" asked the general, hastily.

"To pronounce from appearance, he is a mere boy—brown-haired and blue-eyed, and wears no moustache."

"Where is he, sir?" asked the old man, with a suppressed emotion.

"In this very village. He was forwarded here last night by a special order of the Duke of Savoy, who has taken a deep interest in his fate, and requested that I should take measures, while restoring him, without exchange, to mention tho signal bravery of his conduct."

"The duke's conduct is worthy of a soldier prince!" said the general, with feeling, "and, in my master's name, I beg to thank him."

"The youth is at the temporary hospital, but knows nothing of these arrangements for his release. Perhaps the tidings will come more gratefully to his ears from his own countryman."

"It is kindly spoken, sir. May I have the honour of knowing the name of one who has made this interview so agreeable by his courtesy?"

"My name at this side of the Alps, general, is Count de Valetta; but I have another and better known designation, before I pronounce which, I would gladly enlist in my favour whatever I might of your good opinion."

"All this sounds like a riddle to me, Signor Conte," said the general, "and I am but a plain man, little skilled at unravelling a difficulty."

"I am addressing the General Count von Auersberg," said the other. "Well, sir, it was hearing that you were the officer selected for this duty that induced me to ask I might be appointed also. I have been most anxious to meet you, and, in the accidents of a state of war, knew not how to compass my object."

The old general bowed politely, and waited, with all patience, for further enlightenment.

"My desire for this meeting, general, proceeds from my wish to exculpate myself from what may seem to have been an unqualified wrong done to a member of your family. I am Prince Alexis Midchekoff."

Auersberg started from his chair at the words, and bent a look of angry indignation at the speaker—an expression which the Russian bore with the very calmest unconcern.

"If I am to resume this explanation," said he, coldly, "it must be when you have reseated yourself, and will condescend to hear me suitably."

"And who is to be my guarantee, sir, that I am not to listen to an insult?" cried the old general, passionately. "I see before me the man who has outraged the honour of my house. You know well, sir, the customs of your nation, and that you had no right to accept a lady's hand in betrothal, without the permission of your Emperor."

"I was certain to obtain it," was the calm answer.

"So certain, that it has been refused—peremptorily, flatly refused.

"Very true, general. The refusal came at my own especial request. Nay, sir, I need not tell you these words convey no insulting meaning—but hear me patiently before you pronounce. The facts are briefly these. It came to my knowledge that this young lady's acceptance of me proceeded entirely from considerations of fortune—that she had been greatly influenced by others, and, strongly urged to do that which might, at the sacrifice of herself, benefit her family. These considerations were not very flattering to me, personally; but I should have overlooked them, trusting to time and fortune for the result, had I not also learnt that her affections were bestowed upon another—a young Englishman, with whom she had been for some time domesticated, whose picture she possessed, and from whom she had received letters."

"Am I to take this assertion on trust?" cried the general.

"By no means, sir. This is the picture, and here is one of the letters. I know not if there have been many others, nor can I say whether she has replied to them. It was enough for me that I discovered I had no claim on her affection, and that our marriage would bring only misery on both sides. To have disclosed these facts before the world would of course have exculpated me, but have injured *her*. I therefore took what I deemed a more delicate course, and, by providing for the Imperial refusal, I solved a difficulty that must otherwise have involved her in deep reproach." The prince waited some seconds for the general to speak, but the old man stood like one stunned and stupefied, unable to utter a word. At last, Midchekoff resumed: "My master fixed a sum of eighty thousand roubles, to which I at once assented, as a settlement on Mademoiselle de Dalton; but this, I grieve to say, she has peremptorily rejected."

"Has she—has she done this?" cried the old count. "Then, by St. Stephen! she is my own dear child for ever; come what may, there is no disgrace can attach to her."

"I had hoped, sir," said Midchekoff, "that you might have seen this matter as I did, and that I might have counted on your advocating what is simply a measure of justice."

"I know little of the extent to which money reparations can atone for injured feelings or wounded honour. My life has never supplied even a single lesson on that score. All I see here is, an injury on either side. *Your* fault, I think, has been properly expiated; and as for *hers*, I want no other justification than what you have told me. Now, where is she? When may I see her?"

"I had given orders for her return to Vienna, with the intention of placing her under your charge; but some mistake has occurred, and her departure has been delayed. A second courier has, however, been despatched, and ere this she will have left St. Petersburg."

"You have acted well throughout, prince," said the old general, "and I shall owe you my gratitude for the remainder of my life; not for the delicacy of your reserve, still less for the generous character of your intentions, but because you have shown me that this girl has a high-hearted sense of honour, and is a thorough Dalton." The old man's eyes filled up with tears, and he had to turn away to hide his emotion.

Midchekoff rose to withdraw, affecting to busy himself with the papers on the table, while Auersberg was recovering his self-possession. This did not, however, seem an easy task, for the old general, forgetting everything save Kate, leaned his head on his hands, and was lost in thought.

The prince respected his emotion, and withdrew in silence.

So much was the old General von Auersberg absorbed in his interest for Kate, that he had not a thought to bestow upon the immediate affairs before him. It was scarcely a few weeks since he had received a few lines from herself, telling of the Emperor's refusal, and asking for his advice. It needed all his long-pledged devotion to monarchy to enable him to read the lines without an outbreak of passion; and his first impulse was to seek out the man who had so grossly insulted his house, and challenge him to single combat. Later reflection showed him that this would be to arraign the conduct of the

Emperor, and to call in question the judgment of a crowned head. While agitated by these opposite considerations, there came another and scarcely less sad epistle to his hand; and if the writer was wanting in those claims to station and rank which had such hold upon his heart, her touching words and simple style moved him to emotions that for many a year seemed to have slept within him.

It was Nelly's account of her father's death, told in her own unpretending words, and addressed to one whom she recognized as the head of her house. She dwelt with gratitude on the old count's kindness, and said how often her father had recurred to the thought of his protection and guidance to Frank, when the time should come that would leave him fatherless. It seemed as if up to this point she had written calmly and collectedly, expressing herself in respectful distance to one so much above her. No sooner, however, had she penned Frank's name, than all this reserve gave way before the gushing torrent of her feelings, and she proceeded:

"And oh! sir, is not the hour come when that protection is needed? Is not my poor brother a prisoner, charged with a terrible offence—no less than treason to his Emperor? You, who are yourself a great soldier, can say if such is like to be the crime of one well born, generous, and noble as Frank, whose heart ever overflowed to all who served him, and who, in all the reckless buoyancy of youth, never forgot his honour. Crafty and designing men—if such there may have been around him—might possibly have thrown their snares over him; but no persuasion nor seductions could have made him a traitor. 'See what the Kaiser has made Count Stephen!' were some of the last lines he ever wrote to me, 'and, perhaps, one day, another Dalton will stand as high in the favour of his master.' His whole heart and soul were in his soldier life. You, sir, were his guide-star, and, thinking of you, how could he have dreamed of disloyalty? They tell me, that in troubled times like these, when many have faltered in their allegiance, such accusations are rarely well inquired into, and that courts-martial deal peremptorily with the prisoners; but you will not suffer my brother to be thus tried and judged. You will remember that he is a stranger in that land—an orphan—a mere boy, too—friendless—no, no, not friendless—forgive me the ungracious word—he who bears your name, and carries in his veins your blood, cannot be called friendless. You will say, perhaps, how defend him?—how reply to charges which will be made with all the force of witness and circumstance? I answer, hear his own story of himself; he never told a lie—remember that, count—from his infancy upwards! we, who lived with and about him, know that he never told a lie! If the accusation be just—and oh! may God avert this calamity—Frank will say so. He will tell how, and when, and why this poison of disaffection entered his heart; he will trace out his days of temptation, and struggle, and fall, without a shadow of concealment; and if this sad time is to come, even then do not desert him. Bethink you of his boyhood, his warm, ardent nature, burning for some field of glorious enterprise, and dazzled by visions of personal distinction. How could he judge the knotted questions which agitate the deepest minds of great thinkers? A mere pretence, a well-painted scene of oppression or sufferance, might easily enlist the sympathies of a boy whose impulses have more than once made him bestow on the passing beggar the little hoardings of weeks. And yet, with all these, he is not guilty—I never can believe that he could be! Oh, sir, you know not as I know, how treason in him would be like a living falsehood; how the act of disloyalty would be the utter denial of all those dreams of future greatness which, over our humble fireside, were his world! To serve the Kaiser—the same gracious master who had rewarded and ennobled our great kinsman—to win honours and distinctions that should rival his; to make our ancient name hold a high place in the catalogue of chivalrous soldiers—these were Frank's ambitions. If you but knew how we, his sisters, weak and timid girls, seeking the quiet paths of life, where our insignificance might easiest be shrouded—if you knew how we grew to feel the ardour that glowed in his heart, and actually caught up the enthusiasm that swelled the young soldier's bosom! You have seen the world well and long; and, I ask, is this the clay of which traitors are fashioned? Be a father to him, then, who has none; and may God let you feel all the happiness a child's affection can bestow in return!

"We are a sad heritage, Sir Count! for I now must plead for another, not less a prisoner than my poor brother. Kate is in a durance which, if more splendid, is sad as his. The ceremony of betrothal—which, if I am rightly told, is a mere ceremonial—has consigned her to a distant land and a life of dreary seclusion. There is no longer a reason for this. The sacrifice that she was willing to make can now confer no benefit on him who sleeps in the churchyard. The prince has shown towards her a degree of indifference which will well warrant this breach. There was no affection on either side, and it would be but to ratify a falsehood to pledge fidelity. You alone have influence to effect this. She will hear your counsels, and follow them with respect, and the prince will scarcely oppose what his conduct seems to favour. This done, Sir Count, let Kate be your daughter; and oh! in all the glory of your great successes, what have you gained to compare with this? She loves you already—she has told me of the affectionate gentleness of your manner, the charm of your chivalrous sentiments, and a nobility marked by every word and every gesture. Think, then, of the unbought devotion of such a child—your own by blood and adoption—loving, tending, and ministering to you. Think of the proud beating of your heart as she leans upon your arm, and think of the happiness, as she throws around your solitary fireside all the charm of a home! How seldom is it that generosity doubles itself in its reward, but here it will be so. You will be loved, and you will be happy. With two such children, guided by your influence, and elevated by your example, what would be your happiness, and what their fortune?"

In all these pleadings for those she loved so dearly, no allusion ever was made by her to her own condition. A few lines at the very end of the letter were all that referred to herself. They were couched in words of much humility, excusing herself for the boldness of the appeal she had made, and apologizing for the hardihood with which it might be said she had urged her request.

"But you will forgive—you have already forgiven me, Sir Count," wrote she; "my unlettered style and my trembling fingers have shown you that this task must have lain near to my heart, or I had not dared to undertake it. My life has been spent in a sphere of humble duties and humble companionship. How easily, then, may I have transgressed the limits of the deference that should separate us! I can but answer for my own heart, within which there exists towards you but the one feeling of devotion—deep and hopeful.

"If in your kindness you should ever bestow a thought upon me, you will like to know that I am well and happy. Too lowly in condition, too rude in manners, to share the fortune of those I love so dearly, I would yet delight to hear of and from them, to know that they still bear me in their affection, and think with fondness on poor lame Nelly. Even the blessing of their presence would not repay me for the wrong I should do them by my companionship, for I am a peasant girl, as much from choice as nature. Still, the sister's heart throbs strongly within the coarse bodice, and, as I sit at my work, Frank and Kate will bear me company and cheer my solitary hours.

"My humble skill is amply sufficient to supply all my wants, were they far greater than habit has made them. I live in a land dear to me by associations of thought and feeling, surrounded by those of a condition like my own, and who love and regard me. I am not without my share of duties, too,—your kindness would not wish more for me. Farewell, then, Sir Count. Your high-hearted nature has taught you to tread a lofty path in life, and strive—and with great success—for the great rewards of merit. It will be a pleasure to you yet to know, that in this country of your adoption there are humble prizes for humble aspirants, and that one of these has fallen to the lot of

"NELLY DALTON.

"Any letter addressed 'To the care of Andreas Brennen, Juden Gasse, Innspruck,' will reach me safely. I need not say with what gratitude I should receive it."

Such were the lines which reached the old count's hand on the very day he set out with his detachment for Vienna. Overcome by shame and sorrow at what he believed to be Frank Dalton's treason, he had demanded of the Minister of War his own act of retirement from the army, and for some months had passed a life of privacy in a little village on the Styrian frontier. The wide-spread disaffection of the Austrian provinces—the open revolt of Prague—the more than threatening aspect of Hungary, and the formidable struggle then going on in Lombardy, had called back into active life almost all the retired servants of the monarchy. To give way to private grief at such a moment seemed like an act of disloyalty, and, throwing off every mere personal consideration, the old soldier repaired to the capital, and presented himself at the levée of the Archduke Joseph. He was received with enthusiasm. Covered with years as he was, no man enjoyed more of the confidence and respect of the soldiery, who regarded him as one tried and proved by the great wars of the Empire—a colonel of Wagram was both a patriarch and a hero. It was of great consequence, too, at that precise conjuncture, to rally round the throne all that were distinguished for fealty and devotion. He was immediately appointed to the command of a division of the army, and ordered to set out for Italy.

The complicated nature of the politics of the period—the mixture of just demand and armed menace—the blending up of fair and reasonable expectations with impracticable or impossible concessions, had so disturbed the minds of men, that few were able, by their own unaided judgment, to distinguish on which side lay right and justice; nor was it easy, from the changeful councils of the monarch, to know whether the loyalty of to-day might not be pronounced treason to-morrow. Many of the minor movements of the time—even the great struggle of the Hungarians—originated in a spontaneous burst of devotion to the Emperor—to be afterwards converted by the dark and wily policy of an unscrupulous leader into open rebellion. No wonder, then, if in such difficult and embarrassing circumstances, many strayed unconsciously from the paths of duty—some, misled by specious dreams of nationality; others, from sympathy with what they thought the weaker party; and others, again, by the force of mere companionship, or contact. In this way, few families were to be found where one or more had not joined the patriotic party, and all the ties of affection were weak in comparison with the headlong force of popular enthusiasm. The old General von Auersberg knew nothing of these great changes; no news of them had reached his retirement; so that when he rejoined the army he was shocked to see how many had fallen away and deserted from the ancient standard of the Kaiser. Many a high name and many an ancient title were more than suspected amongst the Hungarian nobility; while in Italy, they who most largely enjoyed the confidence of the Government were to be found in the ranks of the insurgents.

It might be supposed that these things would have in some degree reconciled the old count to the imputed treason of his nephew, and that he would have found some consolation at least in the generality of the misfortune. Not so, however. His mind viewed the matter in a different light. He was willing to concede much to mistaken feelings of nationality, and to associations with a time of former independence; but these motives could have no relation to one who came into the service as he himself and Frank did—soldiers by the grace and favour of the Emperor.

The blot this treason left upon his name was then a sore affliction to one whose whole aim in life had been to transmit an honourable reputation and an unshaken fidelity behind him. His reasoning was thus: "*We* have no claims of ancient services to the monarchy to adduce—*our* ancestors never proved their devotion to the House of Hapsburg in times past—we must be taken for what our own deeds stamp us." With this decisive judgment he was ready to see Frank delivered before a court, tried and sentenced, without offering one word in his behalf. "This done," thought he, "it remains but for me to show that I have made the only expiation in my power, and paid with my heart's blood for another's fault."

Such was the resolve with which he crossed the Alps—a resolve defeated for the moment by discovering that Frank was no longer a prisoner, but had made his escape in some unexplained manner on the eventful day of Goito.

This disappointment, and the still sadder tidings of the Emperor's withheld permission to Kate's marriage, came to his ears the same day—the most sorrowful, perhaps, of his whole life. His honourable fame as a soldier tarnished—his high ambition for a great alliance dashed by disappointment—he fell back for consolation upon poor Nelly's letter. The weak point of his character had ever been a dread of what he called his Irish cousins;—the notion that his successes and supposed wealth would draw upon him a host of hungry and importunate relatives, eager to profit by the hard-won honours of his unaided career. And although year after year rolled on, and no sign was made, nor any token given, that he was remembered in the land of his forefathers, the terror was still fresh in his mind; and when at last Peter Dalton's letter reached him, he read the lines in a torrent of anger—the accumulation of long years of anticipation. Nelly's epistle was a complete enigma to him—she was evidently unprotected, and yet not selfish—she was in the very humblest circumstances, and never asked for assistance—she was feelingly alive to every sorrow of her brother and sister, and had not one thought for her own calamities. What could all this mean?—was it any new phase or form of supplication, or was it really that there did exist one in the world whose poverty was above wealth, and whose simple nature was more exalted than rank or station? With all these conflicting thoughts, and all the emotions which succeeded to the various tidings he had heard, the old count sat overwhelmed by the cares that pressed upon him; nor was it for some hours after Midchekoff's departure that he could rally his faculties to be "up and doing."

The buzz and murmur of voices in an outer room first recalled him to active thought, and he learned that several officers, recently exchanged, had come to offer their thanks for his kind intervention. The duty, which was a mere ceremony, passed over rapidly, and he was once more alone, when he heard the slow and heavy tread of a foot ascending the stairs, one by one, stopping at intervals too, as though the effort was one of great labour. Like the loud ticking of a clock to the watchful ears of sickness, there was something in the measured monotony of the sounds that grated and jarred his irritated nerves, and he called out harshly,—

"Who comes there?"

No answer was returned; and, after a pause of a few seconds, the same sound recurred.

"Who's there?" cried the old man, louder; and a faint, inaudible attempt at reply followed.

And now, provoked by the interruption, he arose to see the cause, when the door slowly opened, and Frank stood before him, pale and bloodless, with one arm in a sling, and supporting himself on a stick with the other. His wasted limbs but half filled his clothes; while in his lustreless eye and quivering lip there seemed the signs of coming death.

With an instinct of kindness, the old general drew out a chair and pressed the poor boy down upon it. The youth kissed the hand as it touched him, and then heaved a heavy sigh.

"This exertion was unfit for you, my poor boy," said the count, kindly. "They should not have permitted you to leave your bed."

"It was my fault, not theirs, general. I heard that you were about to leave the village without coming to the hospital, and I thought, as perhaps——"—here his voice faltered, and a gulping fulness of the throat seemed almost to choke him—"that as, perhaps, we might never meet again in this world, I ought to make one effort to see you, and tell you that I am not, nor ever was, a traitor!"

As though the effort had exhausted all his strength, his arms dropped as he said the words; his head fell forward, and he would have fallen to the ground had not the old general caught him in his arms.

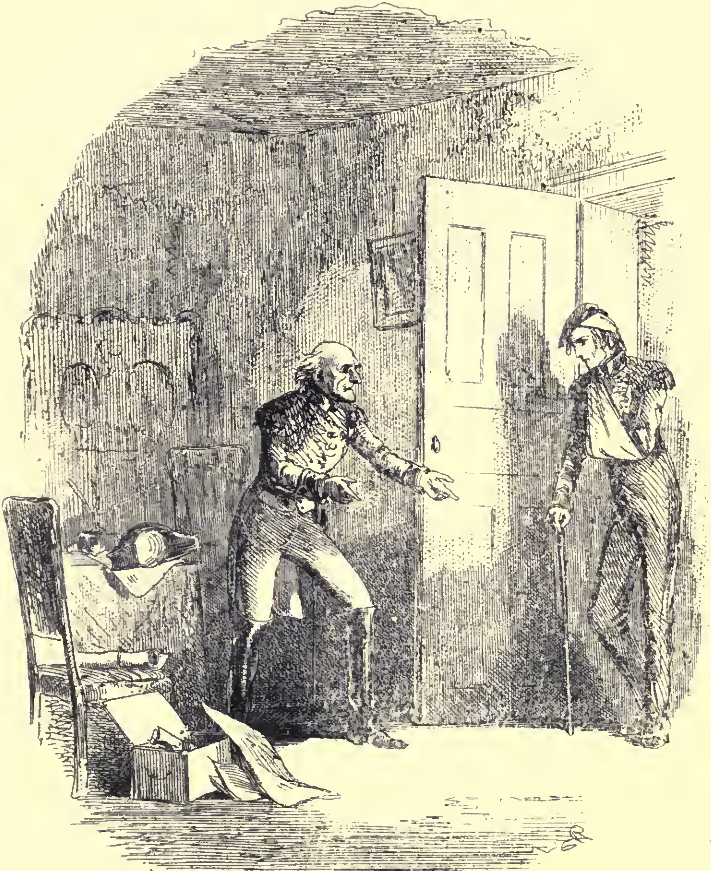
"You are too weak, too ill for all this, my poor fellow," said the count, as he held the boy's hand in his own, and gazed affectionately at him.

"True, ever true," muttered the youth, with half-closed lids.

"I will hear all this when you are better, Frank—when you are strong, and able to declare it manfully and openly. I will bless you, with my heart's warmest blessing, for the words that restore us both to fair fame and honour; but you must not speak more now."

The boy bent his head, in token of submission, but never spoke.

"It will be the proudest hour of my life, Frank, when



The Wounded Soldier.

you can throw off this reproach, and stand forth a thorough Dalton, unshaken in truth and honour. But, to do this, you must be calm and quiet now—not speak, nor even think of these things. You shall remain with me."

Here the boy's tears fell upon the old man's hand. For a second or two not a word was spoken. At last he went on,—

"Yes; you shall not leave me from this hour. Our fortunes are the same. With you it remains to show that we are worthy soldiers of our Kaiser."

Frank pressed the old count's hand upon his heart, as though to call its very pulses to bear witness to his fealty. This simple action seemed to have exhausted his last energy, for he now sank back in his chair and fainted.

The excitement he had gone through appeared to have utterly prostrated him, for he now lay for hours motionless and unconscious. Except a heavy sigh at long intervals, he gave no sign of life; and the surgeons, having exhausted all their resources to stimulate him, gave but faint hope of his recovery. They who only knew the old count as the stern soldier—bold, abrupt, and peremptory—could not conceive by what magic he had been changed into a mould of almost womanly tenderness. There was no care he did not bestow on the sick youth. The first surgeons of the Staff were sent for, and all that skill and affection could suggest were enlisted in his service. The case, however, was of gloomy presage. It was the relapse fever after a wound, aggravated by mental causes of deep influence.

The greatest sympathy was felt for the old count's position. His comrades came or sent frequently to him; kind messages reached him from quarters wherein once lay all his pride and glory; and a young archduke came himself to offer his new litter to convey Frank to Verona, where the Imperial head-quarters were stationed. These were the very flatteries which once Von Auersberg would have prized above all that wealth could give—these were the kind of recognitions by which he measured his own career in life, making him to feel where he stood; but now one grief had so absorbed him, he scarcely noticed them. He could not divest his mind, either, of the thought that the boy's fate was intended as a judgment on himself for his own cold and ungenerous treatment of him. "I forgot," would he say to himself—"I forgot that he was not a castaway like myself. I forgot that the youth had been trained up amidst the flow of affectionate intercourse, loving and beloved, and I compared his position with my own!"

And such was in reality the very error he committed. He believed that by subjecting Frank to all the hard rubs which once had been his own fate he was securing the boy's future success; forgetting the while how widely different were their two natures, and that the affections which are moulded by habits of family association are very unlike the temperament of one unfriended and unaided, seeking his fortune with no other guidance than a bold heart and strong will. The old count was not the only one, nor will he be the last, to fall into this mistake; and it may be as well to take a warning from his error, and learn that for success in the remote and less trodden paths of life the warm affections that attach to home and family are sad obstacles.

It was ten days before Frank could be removed, and then he was carried in a litter, arriving in Verona on the fourth day. From his watchful cares beside the sick-bed, the old general was now summoned to take part in the eventful councils of the period. A great and momentous crisis had arrived, and the whole fate, not only of Austria, but of Europe, depended on the issue. The successes of the Italian arms had been, up to this point, if not decisive, at least sufficiently important to make the result a question of doubt. If the levies contributed by the States of the Church and Tuscany were insignificant in a warlike point of view, they were most expressive signs of popular feeling at least. Austria, besides, was assailed on every flank; with open treason in her capital; and the troops which might have conquered Lombardy were marching northward on Prague, or turning eastward towards Hungary. It then became a grave question whether, even at the cost of the whole Milanais, a peace should not be at once concluded, and Austria merely stipulate for certain commercial advantages, and the undisturbed possession of the Venetian States. If the more dispassionate heads that rule cabinets saw wisdom in this plan, the warmer and less calculating hearts of soldiers deemed it a base humiliation. Long accustomed to treat the Italians with a haughty contempt, they could not endure the thought of recognizing them as equals, not to say superiors. There were thus two parties in the council: the one eager for a speedy termination of the war, and the other burning to erase the memory of late defeats, and win back the fair provinces of their Emperor. To such an extent had this spirit of discordance at last gone, that the cabinet orders of Vienna were more than once overruled at head-quarters, and the very decrees of the Government slighted by the commander-in-chief. It was a time of independent will and personal responsibility; and probably to this accident is owing the salvation of the Imperial House.

At last, when the sympathies of France and England with the cause of Italy became more than a mere suspicion—when troops marched southward towards the Alps, and diplomatic messages traversed Europe, counselling, in all the ambiguous courtesy of red tape, "wise and reasonable concessions to the fair demands of a people," the cabinet of Vienna hastily despatched an envoy to Lombardy, with orders to concert with the generals, and treat for a peace.

Had a squadron of the enemy dashed through the streets of Verona, they could not have created one-half the dismay that did the arrival of the calèche which conveyed the Imperial Commissioner. The old field-marshal had just returned from a review of the troops, who, as usual when he appeared, were wild with enthusiasm, when an officer of his staff announced the presence of the envoy, and in a low whisper added the object of his mission. A council was speedily called, and Von Auersberg specially invited to be present and assist in its deliberations.

The discussion lasted several hours; and, however unshaken in hope and resolute in will the old marshals of the empire, they found themselves no match in argument for the wily civilian, who, displaying before them the financial embarrassments of the state, showed that war implied bankruptcy, and that even victory might mean ruin. The great questions of imperial policy, which in their zeal they had overlooked, were strongly pressed upon them, and that public opinion of Europe, which they had only fancied a bugbear and a mockery, was represented as the formidable expression of the great family of mankind, on the conduct of one of its own members. With all this, it was no easy task to reconcile a bold soldier, at the head of a splendid army, to retire from the field, to confess himself beaten, and to acknowledge defeat, with an assured sense of victory in his heart. The evening closed in, and still they sat in debate. Some had exchanged opposition for a dogged and cold silence; others had modified their views to a kind of half-concession; while a few rallied round their old chief, with a mistaken determination to have one more dash at the enemy, should the peace be ratified on the day after. It would seem as if the "Commissioner" had been fully prepared for every phase of this opposition: he combated every argument in turn, and addressed himself with readiness to every objection that was offered. At last, when, in a burst of mortification and anger, the old field-marshal arose from the table, and declared that, come what might, it should never be said that *he* had lost the provinces of his master, the other stole close beside him, and whispered a few words in his ear. The old man started—his rugged, weather-beaten face twitched with a short, convulsive movement, and he threw himself down into a chair, with a muttered oath on his lips.

There was now a dead silence in the chamber; every eye was turned stealthily towards the old general, by whose counsels they were wont to be guided; but he never spoke a word, and sat with his hands resting on his sword-hilt, the rattle of the scabbard against the belt, as it shook beneath his hand, being the only sound heard.

They are dreadful moments in life when men of high and daring courage see the trust they have long reposed in bold and vigorous measures rejected, and in its stead wily and crafty counsels adopted and followed. This was such a moment; and the old warriors, tried in many a battle-field, scarcely dared to meet each other's eyes, from very shame and sorrow. It was just then that the sharp, quick trot of horses was heard from without, and the jingling sound of bells announced a post-carriage, Scarcely had it stopped, when an aide-de-camp entered, and whispered a few words to the field-marshal.

"No, no," said the old man, peevishly; "we are marching on to dishonour fast enough. We want no priestly aid to hasten our steps."

The young officer appeared to hesitate, and still lingered in the chamber.

"It is your friend, the abbé, has arrived," said the general, addressing the "Commissioner," "and I have said we can dispense with his arguments. He can add little to what you have so ably spoken; and if we are to depose our arms, let it be at the bidding of our Emperor, and not at the beck of a priest."

"But D'Esmonde must have come from the south," interposed the civilian; "he may have some tidings worth hearing."

"Let him come in, then," said the field-marshal, abruptly; and the officer retired.

D'Esmonde had scarcely passed the threshold when his quick, keen glance around the room revealed to him the nature of their gloomy counsels. A dogged look of submission sat on every face, and the wily priest read in their fallen countenances all the bitterness of defeat.

The stern coldness of the reception that met him never abashed the abbé in the least, and he made his compliments to the principal personages of the council with a *suave* dignity the very opposite to their uncourteous manner. Even when he had completed the little circle of his attentions, and stood in expectation of a request to be seated, his air was calm and unembarrassed, although not a word, or even a gesture, gave the invitation. All felt that this should come from the field-marshal himself, and none dared to usurp the prerogative of his rank. Too deeply lost in his own brooding thoughts to attend to anything else, the old general sat still, with his head bent down over the hilt of his sabre.

"His Holiness commissions me to greet you, Herr Feld-Marshal," said the abbé, in a low, soft voice, "and to say that those ancient medals you once spoke of shall be speedily transmitted to your palace at Milan."

"My palace at Milan, sir!" exclaimed the old man, fiercely. "When shall I see that city again? Ask that gentleman yonder, who has just arrived from Vienna, what the cabinet counsels are; he will tell you the glorious tidings that the army will read to-morrow in a general order!"

"I have later news than even *his!*" said the abbé, coolly seating himself at the table, and placing a roll of papers before him. "Baron Brockhausen," said he, addressing the "Commissioner," "if I mistake not, left Vienna on the ninth, reached Innspruck the eleventh, stayed there till the evening of the thirteenth, and only reached here some hours ago. The prime minister, consequently, was unaware that, on the tenth, General Durando was recalled by the Pope; that, on the evening of the same day, Pepe received a similar order from the King of Naples; that the Tuscan levies and the Polish legion have been remanded; and that Piedmont stands alone in the contest, with a disorganized army and divided counsels! These!" said he, pointing to the letters before him—"these are copies of the documents I refer to. You will see from these that the right flank of the Piedmontese army is open and unprotected; that, except the banditti of Rome and Tuscany, there are no troops between this and Ferrara; and if the reinforcements that are now halted in the Tyrol be but hurried down, a great and decisive blow may be dealt at once."

"Bey'm Blitzen! you ought to have been a general of brigade, priest!" cried the old field-marshal, as he clasped his hand in both his own, and pressed it with delight. "These are the noblest words I have heard to-day. Gentlemen," said he, rising, "there is little more for a council to do. You will return at once to your several brigades. Schrann's eight battalions of infantry, with two of Feld-Jägers, to hold themselves in readiness to march to-morrow; the Reuss Hussars to form escort to the light artillery on the Vicenza road; all the other cavalry to take up position to the right, towards Peschiera."

"This means a renewal of hostilities, then?" said the Commissioner.

"It means that I will win back the provinces of my Emperor. Let him dispose of them after as he pleases." And, so saying, he left the room, followed by the other officers.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PLOTS, POLITICS, AND PRIESTCRAFT.

It would conduce but little to the business of our story were we to follow the changeful fortunes of the war, and trace the current of events which marked that important campaign. The struggle itself is already well known, the secret history of the contest has yet to be written. We have hinted at some of the machinations which provoked the conflict; we have shown the deep game by which Democracy was urged on to its own destruction; and, by the triumph of Absolutism, the return of the Church to her ancient rule provided and secured; we have vaguely shadowed out the dark wiles by which freedom and anarchy were inseparably confounded, and the cause of liberty was made to seem the denial of all religion. It would take us too far away from the humble track of our tale were we to dwell on this theme, or stop to adduce the various evidences of the truth of our assumption. We pass on, therefore, and leave D'Esmonde the task of chronicling some of the results of that memorable period.

The letter, from which we propose to make some extracts, was addressed, like his former one, to his Irish correspondent, and opened with a kind of thanksgiving over the glorious events of the preceding few weeks, wherein victory succeeded victory, and the Austrians once again became the masters of haughty Milan. We pass over the exulting description the abbé gave of the discord and dissension in the Patriotic ranks; the reckless charges of treachery made against Carlo Alberto himself, for not undertaking the defence of a city destitute of everything; and the violent insubordination of the Lombards as the terrible hour of their retribution drew nigh. We have not space for his graphic narrative of the King's escape from Milan, protected by an Austrian escort, against the murderous assaults of fellow-patriots! These facts are all before the world, nor would it contribute to their better understanding were we to adduce the partisan zeal with which the priest detailed them.

"The struggle, you will thus see," wrote he, "is over. The blasphemer and the democrat have fallen together, and it will take full a century to rally from the humiliation of such a defeat. Bethink you, my dear Michel, what that same century may make the Church, and how, if we be but vigorous and watchful, every breach in the glorious fortress may be repaired, every outwork strengthened, every bastion newly mounted, and her whole garrison refreshed and invigorated. Without a great convulsion like this we were lost! The torpor of peace brought with it those habits of thought and reflection—the sworn enemies of all faith! As governments grew more popular they learnt to rely less on *our* aid. The glorious sway of Belief was superseded by direct appeals to what they called common sense, and imperceptibly, but irrevocably, the world was being Protestantized. Do not fancy that my fears have exaggerated this evil. I speak of what I know thoroughly and well. Above all, do not mistake me, as though I confounded this wide-spread heresy with what you see around you in Ireland, those backslidings which you so aptly called 'soup conversions.'

"By Protestantism, I mean something more dangerous than Anglicanism, which, by the way, has latterly shown itself the very reverse of an enemy. The peril I dread is that spirit of examination and inquiry which, emboldened by the detection of some trumpery trick, goes on to question the great dogma of our religion. And here I must say, that these miracles—as they will call them—have been most ill-judged and ill-timed. Well adapted as they are to stimulate faith and warm zeal in remote and unvisited villages, they are serious errors when they aspire to publicity and challenge detection. I have done all I could to discountenance them; but even in the Vatican, my dear Michel, there are men who fancy we are living in the sixteenth century. What are you to do with a deafness that cannot be aroused by the blast of a steam-engine, and which can sleep undisturbed by the thunder of railroads? Well, let us be thankful for a little breathing time; the danger from these heretics is over for the present. And here I would ask of you to mark how the very same result has taken place wherever the battle was fought. The Church has been triumphant everywhere. Is this accident, my dear friend? Was it mere chance that confounded counsels here, and dealt out ruin to Ireland also? Why did our policy come to a successful issue, here, by a dangerous conflict; and, with you, by abstaining from one? Why, because it was truth—eternal, immutable truth—for which we struggled. I must say that if *our* game called for more active exertions, and perhaps more personal hazards, *yours* in Ireland was admirably devised. There never was a more complete catastrophe than that into which you betrayed your Mitchells and Meaghers; and does not the blind credulity of such men strike you as a special and Divine infliction? I own I think so. They were, with all their hot blood, and all the glow of their youth, serious thinkers and calm reasoners. They could detect the finger of *England* in every tangled scheme, and yet they never saw the shadow of *your* hand as it shook in derision over them. Yes, Michel, the game was most skilfully played, and I anticipate largely from it. The curtain thus falls upon the first act of the drama; let us set about to prepare for its rising. I am far from saying that many errors—some of the gravest kind—have not been committed in the conduct of this affair. More than one grand opportunity has gone by without profit; and even my suggestion about the restoration of the States of the Church to their ancient limits within the Venetian provinces—a demand which Rome has formally renewed every year since the treaty of Campo Formio, and which might now have been pressed with success—even this was neglected! But what could be done with a runaway Pope and a scattered Consistory? Your letter, my dear Michel, is a perfect catechism—all questions! I must try a reply to some, at least, of its inquiries. You are anxious about the endowment of the Ursulines, and so am I; but unfortunately I can tell you little of my progress in that direction. Lady Hester Onslow would appear to have fallen into an entanglement of some sort with Lord Norwood; and although I have in my possession the means of preventing a marriage with him, or annulling it, if it should take place, yet the very exercise of this power, on my part, would as inevitably destroy all my influence over her, and be thus a mere piece of profitless malice. This, therefore, is a matter of some difficulty, increased, too, by his hasty departure from Florence—they say for England; but I have no clue to his destination, for he left this on the very day I last wrote to you—the day of my visit to the Moskova—in which you seem to be so much interested. Strangely enough, Michel, both this man and the Russian seemed to feel that they were in the toils, and broke away, rather than hazard an encounter with me. And they were right, too! For the deep game of life, there is no teaching like that of the cloister; and if we be not omnipotent, it is owing to our weakness of purpose. Hildebrand knew this—Boniface knew it also: but we have fallen upon poor successors of these great men! What might not a great Pope be in the age we live in!—one whose ambition was commensurate with his mission, and who had energy and courage for the task before him! Oh! how I felt this, some nights ago, as I sat closeted with our present ruler—would you believe it, Michel, he has no higher guide or example than the weak and kind-hearted Pius the Seventh? To imitate *him* is the whole rule of his faith, and to resemble him, even in his misfortunes, has become an ambition. How he strung for me the commonplaces of that good man, as though they had been the distilled essences of wisdom! Alas! alas! the great heritage of the Church has not been won by Quaker Popes.

"You ask about myself. All goes well. The die is cast; and so far, at least, a great point gained. The Austrians saw the matter in its true light, and with justice perceived that diplomacy is a war of reprisals. How I glory in the anticipation of this vengeance upon England, the encourager and abettor of all the treason against our Faith! How little do they suspect the storm that is gathering around them; how tranquilly are they walking over the ground that is to be earthquaken! The letters and diplomas are all prepared. The Bull itself is ready; to-morrow, if it were opportune, I might be proclaimed a prince of the Church and an archbishop of an English see! As in every great event of life the moment is everything, the question is now one of time. Guardoni—and I look upon him as the shrewdest of the cardinals—says, 'Wait! our cause is advancing every day in England; every post brings us tidings of desertions to our army—men distinguished in rank, station, or intellect. In our controversies we have suffered no defeats, while our moderation has gained us many well-wishers; we have a tone of general liberality to work upon that is eminently favourable to a policy, meek, lowly, and unpretending. Therefore, I say, Wait; and do not forfeit such advantages for the glory of a pageant.' Against this it might be urged, that the hour is come to proclaim our victory; and that it would be a craven policy not to unfurl our banner above the walls we have won! I repose less trust in the force of this reasoning than in another view of the subject; and it is to the ricochet of our shot, Michel, that I look for the damage of our enemy. My calculation is this: the bold pretensions we advance will arouse the passions of the whole island; meetings, and addresses, and petitions, will abound. All the rampant insolence of outraged bigotry, all the blatant denunciations of insulted Protestantism, will burst forth like a torrent. We shall be assailed in pamphlets and papers; caricatured, hooted, burned in effigy. A wily and well-conducted opposition on our part will fan and feed this flame. Some amongst us will assume the moderate tone; invoke the equality that pertains to every born Briton, and ask for the mere undisturbed exercise of our faith. Others, with greater boldness, will adventure sorties against the enemy, and thus provoke reply and discussion. To each will be assigned his suited task. All labouring for the one great object—to maintain the national fever at a white heat—to suffer no interval of calm reflection to come—and to force upon the Parliament, by the pressure of outward opinion, some severe, or, at least, some galling act of legislation. This once accomplished, our game is won, and the great schism we have so long worked for effected! It will then be the Government on one side and the Church on the other. Could you wish for anything better? For myself, I care little how the campaign be then conducted; the victory must be our own. I have told you again and again there is no such policy against England as that of hampering the course of her justice. It was O'Connell's secret; he had no other; and he never failed till he attempted something higher. First, provoke a rash legislation, and then wait for the discomfiture that will follow it! With all the boasted working of the great constitution, what a mere trifle disturbs and disjoints it! Ay, Michel, a rusty nail in the cylinder will spoil the play of the piston, although the engine be rated at a thousand horse-power. Such a conflict with Protestantism is exactly like the effect of a highly disciplined army taking the field against a mob. With *us*, all is preconcerted, prearranged, and planned; with *them*, everything is impulsive, rash, and ill-advised. This glorious prerogative of private judgment becomes a capital snare, when measures should be combined and united. Fancy—I ask of you—fancy all the splendid errors of their hot enthusiasm—think of the blunders they will commit on platform or pulpit—reflect upon the folly and absurdity that will fill the columns of the public journals, and all the bigoted balderdash the press will groan under! What coarse irony, what Billingsgate shall we hear of our Holy Church—her saints, her miracles, and her dogmas—what foul invectives against her pious women and their lives of sanctity! And then think of the glorious harvest that will follow, as we reply to insult by calm reasonings, to bigotry by words of charity and enlightenment, appealing to the nation at large for their judgment on which side truth should lie—with intolerance, or with Christian meekness and submission?

"Prepare, then, I say, for the coming day; the great campaign is about to open, and neither you nor I, Michel, will live to see the end of the battle. On this side the Alps, all has happened as we wished. Italian Liberalism is crushed and defeated. The Piedmontese are driven back within their frontier, their army beaten, and their finances all but exhausted, and Austria is again at the head of Northern Italy. Rome will now be grander and more glorious than ever. No more truckling to Liberalism—no more faith in the false prophets of Freedom. Our gorgeous 'Despotism' will arise reinvigorated by its trials, and the Church will proclaim herself the Queen of Europe!

"It is an inestimable advantage to have convinced these meek and good men here that there is but one road to victory, and that all alliance with what are called politicians is but a snare and a delusion.

"The Pope sees this at last, but nothing short of wounded pride could have taught him the lesson.

"Now to your last query, my dear Michel, and I feel all gratitude for the warm interest with which you make it. What is to be done I know not. I am utterly ignorant of my parentage—even of my birthplace. In the admission-book of Salamanca I stand thus: 'Samuel Eustace, native of Ireland, aged thirteen years and seven months; stipendiary of the second class.' There lies my whole history. A certain Mr. Godfrey had paid all the expenses of my journey from Louvain, and, up to the period of his death, continued to maintain me. From Louvain I can learn nothing. I was a 'Laic' they believed —perhaps No. 134, or 137—they do not know which; and these are but sorry facts from which to derive the baptismal registry of a future cardinal. And yet something must be done, and speedily too. On the question of birth the Sacred College is peremptory. You will say that there ought to be no difficulty in devising a genealogy where there are no adverse claims to conflict; and if I could go over to Ireland, perhaps the matter might be easy enough. At this moment, however, my presence here is all-essential, while I am not without a hope that accident may afford me a clue to what I seek. A few days ago I was sent for from Malgherra to attend the dying bed of a young officer, whose illness had so completely disordered his brain that he forgot every word of the foreign language he was accustomed to speak, and could only understand or reply in his native English. Although I had other and more pressing cases to attend to, the order coming from an archduke made obedience imperative, and so I hastened over to Verona, where the sick youth lay. Conceive my surprise, Michel, to discover that he was the same Dalton—the boy whom I have so often adverted to, as eternally crossing my path in life— the relative of that Godfrey who was my early patron. I have already confessed to you, Michel, that I felt towards this youth in a way for which my calmest reason could render no account. Gamblers have often told me of certain antipathies they have experienced, and that the mere presence of an individual—one totally unknown to them, perhaps—has been so ominous of ill-luck that they dare not risk a bet while he remained in the room. I know you will say, that men who pass their lives in the alternation of hope and fear become the slaves of every shadow that crosses the imagination, and that they are sorry pilots to trust to. So they are, Michel; they are meanly minded, they are sordid, and they are low; their thoughts never soar above the card or the hazard-table; they are dead to all emotions of family and affection; the very events that are convulsing the world are less audible to their ears than the ring of the dice-box; and yet, with all this—would you believe it?—they are deep in the mysteries of portents. Their intense study of what we call chance has taught them to combine, and arrange, and discipline every atom and accident that can influence an event. They have their days of good and evil fortune, and they have their agencies that sway them to this side or to that. Chemistry shows us that substances that resemble metals are decomposed by the influence of light alone—do not, then, despise the working of that gleam that darts from a human eye and penetrates within the very recesses of your brain.

"Be the theory true or false, the phenomena exercise a deep influence over me, and I have never ceased to regard this boy as one inextricably interwoven with myself and my own fortunes; I felt a degree of dread at his contact, which all my conscious superiority of mind and intellect could not allay. In vain have I endeavoured to reason myself out of these delusions, but in the realm of imagination reason is inoperative; as well might a painter try to commit to his palette the fleeting colours of the rainbow. Shall I own to you, that in moments of illness or depression, this terror magnified itself to giant proportions, and a thousand wild and incongruous fancies would fill my mind? I bethought me of involving him in such difficulty that he would no longer be at large; as a prisoner or an exile, I should never see him more. Every snare I tried was a failure; the temptations that were most adapted to his nature he resisted; the wiles I threw around him he escaped from. Was there not a fate in all this? Assuredly there was and is, Michel. I cannot tell you the relief of mind I should feel if this boy had shared the fate of your patriots, and that the great sea was to roll between him and Europe for ever. Twenty times a day I think of Dirk Hatteraick's expression with respect to Brown: 'That boy has been a rock ahead of me all through life;' and be assured that the characters of fiction are often powerful teachers.

"And now to my narrative. The same note which requested my visit at Verona begged of me, if I possibly could accomplish it, to provide some English person who should sit up with the sick youth and nurse him. I was not sorry to receive this commission; I wished to learn more about this boy than the confessional at such a time could teach; and could I only find a suitable agent, this would not be difficult. Chance favoured me strangely enough. Amongst the prisoners taken at Ancona I found an Irish fellow, who, it appears, had taken service in the Piedmontese navy. He had been some years in America and the West Indies, and from the scattered remarks that he let fall, I perceived that he was a man of shrewd and not over-scrupulous nature. He comprehended me in an instant; and, although I was most guarded in giving my instructions, the fellow read my intentions at once. This shrewdness might, in other circumstances, have its inconveniences, but here it gave me no alarm. I was the means of his liberation, and, were he troublesome, I could consign him to the prison again—to the galleys, if needed. In company with this respectable ally, I set out for the head-quarters. On my arrival, I waited on the Count von Auersberg, in whose house the sick boy lay. This old man, who is Irish by birth, is more Austrian in nature than the members of the House of Hapsburg. I found him fully convinced that the white-coated legions had reconquered Lombardy by their own unaided valour, and I left him in the same pleasant delusion. It appeared that a certain Count von Walstein was enabled to clear young Dalton's character from all taint of treason, by exhibiting, in his own correspondence, some letters and documents that related to the events detailed in Frank's writing, and of which he could have had no possible knowledge. This avowal may be a serious thing for Walstein, but rescues the young Dalton at once, and proves that he was merely the writer of Ravitzky's sentiments; so that here, again, Michel, he escapes. Is not this more than strange?

"It was not without anxiety that I passed the threshold of the sick chamber; but happily it was darkened, and I soon saw that the sick youth could never recognize me, were his senses even unclouded. He lay motionless, and I thought insensible; but after I spoke to him he rallied a little, and asked after his father and his sisters. He had not yet heard that his father was dead; and it was affecting to hear the attempt he made to vindicate his honour, and show that he had never been disloyal. By degrees I brought him to talk of himself. He saw that he was dying, and had no fears of death; but there seemed as if his conscience was burdened by some heavy weight, less like guilt than the clue to some strange and dark affair. The revelation—if it deserved the name, for it was made in broken sentences—now, uttered with rapid vehemence, now, scarcely audible—was of the vaguest kind. You may imagine, however, the interest I felt in the narrative as the name Godfrey passed his lips. You know my anxiety to trace some tie of family to these Godfreys. They were gentry of ancient blood and good name, and would amply satisfy the demands of the Sacred College; so that when the boy spoke of Godfrey, I listened with intense curiosity; but—shall I own it?—all my practised skill, all my science of the sick bed, was unable to tell me what were the utterings of an unclouded intellect, and what the wild fitful fancies of fever. I know, for I have repeatedly heard it from his sister's lips, that this youth has never been in Ireland, and yet he spoke of the peculiar scenery of a certain spot just as if he had traversed it yesterday. Mind, that I am carefully distinguishing between what might be the impression left by often hearing of a scene from others, and that which results from personal observation. His was altogether of the latter kind. As, for instance, when describing a garden, he mentioned how the wind wafted the branches of a weeping ash across a window, so as to confuse the scene that went on within; and then he shuddered terribly, and, with a low sigh, exclaimed, 'The light went out *after* that.' These are not ravings, Michel. This boy knows something of that dark mystery I have more than once alluded to in my letters. Could it be that his own father was in some way implicated in the affair? Bear in mind how he came to live abroad, and never returned to Ireland. From all I can learn, the old Dalton was a bold and reckless character, that would scarcely have stopped at anything. Assuredly, the son's conscience is heavily burdened! Now, there is an easy way to test the truth or fallacy of all this; and herein you must aid me, Michel I have carefully noted every word the boy spoke; I have treasured every syllable that fell from him. If his description of the scene be correct, the mystery may be unravelled, This you can speedily ascertain by visiting the spot. It is not more than twenty miles from you, and about three or four, I believe, from the little village of Inistioge; it is called Corrig-O'Neal—a place of some importance once, but now, as I hear, a ruin. Go thither, Michel, and tell me correctly all these several points. First, does the character of the river scenery suddenly change at this spot, and, from an aspect of rich and leafy beauty, exhibit only dark and barren mountains without a tree or a shrub? Is the old manor-house itself only a short distance from the stream, and backed by these same gloomy mountains? The house itself, if unaltered, should be high-peaked in roof, with tall, narrow windows, and a long terrace in front; an imitation, in fact, of an old French château. These, as you will see, are such facts as might have been heard from another; but, now, I come to some less likely to have been so learned.

"From this boy's wanderings, I collect that there is a woodland path through these grounds, skirting the river in some places, and carried along the mountain-side by a track escarped in the rock itself. If this ever existed, its traces will still be visible. I am most curious to know this fact. I can see the profound impression it has made on the youth's mind, by the various ways in which he recurs to it, and the deep emotion it always evokes. At times, indeed, his revelations grow into something like actual descriptions of an event he had witnessed; as, for instance, last night he started from his sleep, his brow all covered with perspiration, and his eyes glaring wildly: 'Hush!' he cried; 'hush! He is crossing the garden, now; there he is at the door; lie still—lie still.' I tried to induce him to talk on, but he shuddered timidly, and merely said, ' It's all over, he has strewn leaves over the spot, let us go away.' You will perhaps say that I attach undue importance to what may be the mere outpourings of a fevered intellect, but there is an intensity in the feeling which accompanies them, and, moreover, there is a persistence in the way he always comes back to them, that are not like the transient terrors that haunt distracted minds. No, Michel, there is a mystery, and a dreadful one, connected with this vision. Remember! that the secret of Godfrey's death has never been cleared up; the breach which separated him from these Daltons was then at its widest. Dalton's character you are familiar with; and, although abroad at that time, who can say what agencies may not have worked for him? Give your serious consideration to these facts, and tell me what you think. You know me too well and too long to suppose that I am actuated by motives of mere curiosity, or simply the desire to trace the history of a crime. I own to you, that with all my horror of blood, I scarcely grieve as I witness the fruitless attempts of English justice to search out the story of a murder. I feel a sort of satisfaction at the combat between Saxon dulness and Celtic craft—between the brute force of the conqueror, and the subtle intelligence of the conquered—that tells me of a time to come when these relations shall be reversed. Acquit me, therefore, of any undue zeal for the observance of laws that only remind me of our slavery. However clear and limpid the stream may look, I never forget that its source was in foulness! I am impelled here by a force that my reason cannot account for. My boyhood was, in some manner, bound up with this Godfrey's fate. I was fatherless when he died! could he have been my father? This thought continually recurs to me! Such a discovery would be of great value to me just now; the question of legitimacy would be easily got over, as I seek for none of the benefits of succession. I only want what will satisfy the Sacred College. My dear Michel, I commit all this to your care and industry; give me your aid and your advice. Should it happen that Dalton was involved in the affair, the secret might have its value. This old field-marshal's pride of name and family could be turned to good account.

"I must tell you, that since I have overheard this boy's ravings, I have studiously avoided introducing my Irish *protégé* into the sick room. My friend, Paul Meekins, might be a most inconvenient confidant, and so I shall keep him under my own eye till some opportunity occurs to dispose of him. He tells me that his present tastes are all ecclesiastical. Do you want a sacristan? if so, he would be your man. There is no such trusty subordinate as the fellow with what the French call 'a dark antecedent;' and this I suspect to be his case.

"I have well wearied you, my dear friend, and yet have I not told you half of what I feel on this strange matter. I am little given to tremble at shadows, and still there are terrors over me that I cannot shake off. Write to me, then, at once; tell me all that you see—all that you can hear. Observe well the localities; it will be curious if the boy be correct. Mark particularly if there be a spot of rising ground from which the garden is visible, and the windows that look into it, and see if there be a door out of the garden, at this point. I could almost map out the scene from his description.

"I have done, and now, I scarcely know whether I should feel more relief of heart to know that all this youth has said were fever wanderings, or words of solemn meaning. It is strange how tranquilly I can move through the great events of life, and yet how much a thing like this can shake my nerve; but I suppose it is ever so, and that we are great or little as the occasion makes us.

"I have just heard that Lady Hester Onslow has gone over to Ireland. She will probably be at Corrig-O'Neal. If so, you can present yourself to her as my old and intimate friend, and this will afford you an opportunity of examining the scene at leisure. I enclose you a few lines to serve as an introduction. Adieu, my dear friend.

"You have often sighed over the obscurity of your position, and the unambitious life of a parish priest. Believe me, and from my heart I say it, I would willingly exchange all the rewards I have won, all that I could ever hope to win, for one week—one short week—of such calm quiet as breathes under the thatched roof of your little cottage.

"I leave this for Vienna to-morrow, to thank the minister; and with good reason, too, since without his assistance the Pope would have shrunk from the bold policy. Thence I go to Rome; but within a fortnight I shall be back in Florence, where I hope to hear from you. If all goes well, we shall meet soon.—Yours, in much affection.

"MATTHEW D'ESMONDE."

As the abbé finished this letter, he turned to look at a short note, which, having opened and scanned over, he had thrown on the table beside him. It was from Albert Jekyl, who wrote to inform him that Lord Norwood had just arrived in Florence from Ireland, where he had left Lady Hester. That so far as he, Jekyl, could make out, the viscount had made an offer of marriage, and been accepted.

"It will be for you, my dear abbé," added he, "to ascertain this fact positively, as, independently of the long journey at this inclement season, it would be a very serious injury to me were it known that I advanced pretensions that were not responded to. He who has never failed must not risk a defeat. Pray lose no time in investigating this affair, for Florence is filling fast, and my future plans will depend on your reply."

The priest bestowed little attention on the small gossipry that filled up the page. His eye, however, caught the name of Midchekoff, and he read,—

"The prince returned last Tuesday to the Moskova, but no one has seen him, nor has any one been admitted within the gates. Of course there are a hundred rumours as to the why and the wherefore. Some, alleging that he has received orders of 'reclusion,' as they call it, from home, the Emperor not being quite satisfied with his political campaign; some, that he has taken up a grudge against the court here, and shows his spleen in this fashion. But what shallow reason would this be for a hermit life? and what legitimate ground of complaint have not we, who, so to say, possess a vested interest in his truffles, and ortolans, and dry champagne? I assure you that such conduct rouses all the democracy of my nature, and I write these lines with a red silk cap on my head. After all, the real good he effected was a kind of reflected light. He crushed little people, and ground down all their puny efforts at balls, dinners, and *déjeûners*. He shamed into modest insignificance such a world of snobbery, and threw an air of ridicule over 'small early party-ism,' and 'family dinners.' What a world of dyspepsia has he thus averted—what heartburns and heartburnings! Oh, little people! little people! ye are a very dreadful generation, for ye muddy the waters of society, so that no man can drink thereof.

"Politically, we are calm and reactionary; and, whether it be thrashing has done it, I know not, but some of the Tuscans are 'Black and Yellow' already. Not that the dear Austrians promise to make Florence better or pleasanter. They mix badly with our population. It is as if you threw a spoonful of 'sauerkraut' into your 'potage à la reine!' Besides, the Italians are like the Chinese—unchanged and unchangeable—and they detest the advent of all strangers who would interfere with their own little, soft, sleepy, and enervating code of wickedness.

"Pray send me three lines, just to say—Is it to be or not to be? Rose, the tailor, is persecuting me about a mocha-brown, for a wedding garment, which certainly would harmonize well with the prevailing tints of my hair and eyebrows, but I am too prudent a diplomatist to incur 'extraordinaires' till I be sure of 'my mission.' Therefore write at once, for such is my confidence in your skill and ability that I only wait your mandate to launch into kid gloves and lacquered leather, quite regardless of expense.

"Yours, most devotedly,

"ALBERT JEKYL.

"I open this to say, that Morlache was seen going to the Moskova last night with two caskets of jewels. Will this fact throw any light on the mysterious seclusion?"

These last two lines D'Esmonde read over several times, and then, crushing the note in his hand, he threw it into the fire. Within an hour after, he was on his way to Florence.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SECRET AND A SNARE.

As we draw near to the end of our voyage, we feel all the difficulty of collecting the scattered vessels of our convoy, and, while signalizing the "clippers" to shorten sail, we are calling on the heavy sailers to crowd "all their canvas."

The main interest of our story would keep us beside Frank Dalton, whose fate seemed daily to vacillate—now, threatening gloomily—now, rallying into all the brightness of hope. By slow and cautious journeys the old count proceeded to remove him to Vienna, where he expected soon to be joined by Kate. Leaving them, then, to pursue their road by steps far too slow for our impatience, we hasten along with D'Esmonde, as, with all the speed he could accomplish, he made for Florence.

Occasionally he tried to amuse himself and divert his thoughts by conversing with Meekins, who accompanied him; but, although the man's shrewdness was above the common, and his knowledge of the world very considerable, D'Esmonde quickly saw that a thick cloak of reserve covered the real man on all occasions, and that his true nature lay many a fathom deep below that smooth surface. The devout respect which he felt for the abbé might, perhaps, have increased this reserve—for Meekins was an Irish peasant, and never forgot the deference due to a priest.

Accustomed to read men at sight, D'Esmonde would give himself no trouble in deciphering a page which promised little to reward the labour; and so, after a while, he left his companion to occupy the "box," while he himself followed his own thoughts alone and undisturbed. Now and then he would be aroused from his deep reveries by remarking the reverential piety of the peasants as they passed some holy shrine or some consecrated altar. Then, indeed, Meekins displayed a fervour so unlike the careless indifference of the native, that D'Esmonde was led to reflect upon the difference of their natures, and speculate on how far this devotion of character was innate in the Irishman, or merely the result of circumstances.

There was an expression of eager, almost painful meaning, too, in the man's face as he muttered his prayers, that struck the keen eyes of the abbé; and he could not avoid saying to himself, "That fellow has a load upon his heart. Fear, and not hope, is the mainspring of his devotions." At another moment, D'Esmonde might have studied the case as a philosopher studies a problem—merely for the exercise it may give his faculties—but his own cares were too pressing and too numerous for more than a passing notice.

The night was falling as they gained the crest of the mountain over Florence; D'Esmonde stopped the carriage on the hill above the "Moskova," and gazed steadily for some moments on the spot. The villa, partly shrouded in trees, was brilliantly illuminated; the lights gleamed and sparkled through the foliage, and, as he listened, the sound of rich music came floating on the air.

"This looks little like seclusion," thought he. "These are signs of some great festivity." As he drew up to the gate, however, he found it closed and locked. Not a carriage was to be seen. Even the usual lamps were unlighted, and all appeared deserted and unoccupied. D'Esmonde stood for a few seconds buried in thought; his emotion was deep and heartfelt; for, as he grasped the iron bars of the gate, his strong frame shook and trembled. "True—true!" muttered he to himself in an accent of almost bursting agony—"I could not have given thee this, Lola, and for this alone hadst thou any heart!" He leaned his face against the gate, and sobbed heavily. "What poison," cried he, in a voice of bitterness—"what poison there must be in unholy passion, when it can move a heart like mine, after years and years of time! To think that not all the glory of a great cause, all the pride of successful ambition, striving for rewards the very highest—all that I possess of power and influence—all, all should give way to the grief for a half-forgotten, unreturned love!

How poor a thing the heart is, when we fancy its desires to be noblest and highest!"

This burst of passionate grief over, he slowly returned to the carriage and pursued his way to Florence; and, entering the city, he drove for the house of Racca Morlache. The Jew was not at home, but was to return by eleven o'clock, at which hour he had ordered supper for a guest and himself. D'Esmonde lay down on a sofa, and fell asleep. Wearied as he was, his watchfulness soon detected the approach of footsteps; and, as he listened, he heard the voice of a stranger in colloquy with the servant. The door opened at the same time, and Lord Norwood entered. D'Esmonde only waited for the servant to retire, when he sprang forward to salute him.

"Oh! I thought you were at the camp, or at Vienna, or somewhere to the north'ard," said the viscount, coolly.

"I was so, my lord; and there I should have remained, if a pressing duty had not recalled me to Florence."

"You have always so many irons in the fire, abbé, that it requires some skill to keep them all hot."

"You are right, my lord; some skill, and some practice, too."

"And do you never burn your fingers?" said the other, sarcastically.

"Very rarely, my lord; for, when I meddle with fire, I generally make use of my friends' hands."

"By Jove, it's not a bad plan!" cried the viscount, laughing; for, as the priest well knew, he had a most lively appreciation for every species of knavery, and entertained real respect for all who practised it. "You *are* a very downy cove, Master D'Esmonde," said he, gazing at him; "and you'd have made a very shining figure on the Turf, had your fortune thrown you in that direction."

"Perhaps so, my lord," said the abbé, carelessly. "My own notion is, that fair natural gifts are equal to any exigencies ever demanded of us; and that the man of average talent, if he have only energy and a strong will, has no superior to dread."

"That may do well enough," said Norwood, rising and pacing the room—"that may do well enough in the common occurrences of life, but it won't do on the Turf, abbé. The fellows are too artful for you there. There are too many dodges, and tricks, and windings. No, no, believe me ; nothing has a chance in racing matters without perfect and safe 'information ;' you know what that means."

"It is precisely the same thing in the world at large," said D'Esmonde. "The very cleverest men rush into embarrassments and involve themselves in difficulties for which there is no issue, simply for want of what you call 'information.' Even yourself, my lord," said he, dropping his voice to a low and distinct whisper—"even yourself may discover that you owe safety to a Popish priest."

"How do you mean ? What do you allude to ? " cried Norwood, eagerly.

"Sit down here, my lord. Give me a patient hearing for a few minutes. We have fortunately a moment of unbroken confidence now ; let us profit by it."

Norwood seated himself beside the priest, without speaking, and, folding his arms, prepared to hear him calmly.

"My Lord Norwood," said the abbé, "I will not torture you by any prolixity, nor will I waste your time by any appeal to your forgiveness. If my own conduct in the affair I am about to relate should not meet your approval, it is enough that I have satisfied my own conscience."

"Go on—go on," said Norwood, in a tone of almost sarcasm ; "I see that you have injured me, let me hear how and where."

"You shall hear both, my lord, and briefly too. I have only to invoke your memory, and the story is told. You remember being at Salamanca, in the year 18—? You remember, too, a certain ballerina of the Grand Opera ? You had seen her first at Seville——"

"Yes—yes," broke in Norwood, reddening deeply ; "I know what you mean—the girl was my mistress."

"Stay, my lord. Do not dishonour yourself ; she was your wife—legally and formally married to you—the registry of the act is in existence, and the priest who performed the ceremony now stands before you."

"By Heaven ! " said Norwood, springing to his feet, "you are a bold fellow to dare this game with *me !* and to try it in such a place as this ! "

"Ay, my lord, the river rolls dark and silently beside us," said D'Esmonde, calmly, "and the Arno has covered up many a more dreadful deed; but I have no fears—not one. I am unarmed, in strength I am certainly not your equal, and yet, I repeat it, my heart assures me that I stand in no peril."

For an instant Norwood seemed to hesitate how to act. The great veins of his face and forehead became swollen and knotted, and he breathed with the rushing sound of severe, restrained passion. At last, as if to guard himself against any sudden impulse of anger, he walked round and seated himself at the opposite side of the table.

D'Esmonde resumed as calmly as before—"Yes, my lord, Lola took care that everything should be regular and in form; and the names of Gerald Acton and Lola de Seviglia are inscribed on the records of the Collegiate Chapel. Two of the witnesses are still living; one of them, then a poor boy carrying messages for the convent, is now captain in the Pope's Guard."

"Come, come—enough of this," cried Norwood, impatiently. "I see the drift of it all. When the Church interposes her kind offices, the question resolves itself always into money. How much—how much?"

"You mistake greatly, my lord; but your error does not offend me. I know too well how men of *your* form of belief regard men of *mine!* I am not here either to combat a prejudice, or assert a right. I tell you, therefore, calmly and dispassionately, that no demand is made upon you. There is no siege laid against you, in person or in purse."

"Then how does the matter concern me, if this girl be alive?—and even of that I have my doubts——"

"You need have none," said D'Esmonde, interruptingly. "Lady Norwood——"

"Stop! By Heaven! if you dare to give her that name, I'll not answer for myself."

"I call her as she styles herself—as she is called by all around her. Yes, my lord, the shame is as open as gossip and malevolence can make it. The foreigner is but too glad when he can involve an English name and title in a reproach that we are prone to cast upon him. A peeress is a high mark for scandal! Who stoops to ask how, or when, or where she became this? Who interposes a charitable word of explanation or of incredulity? From what you know of life, on what side, think you, will lie the ingenuity and craft? Whether will the evidence preponderate to prove her your wife or to exonerate *you?* At all events, how will the matter read in England? I speak not of your ruined hopes of an alliance befitting your high station. *This* is beyond repairing! But are you ready to meet the shame and ignominy of the story? Nothing is too base, nothing too infamous, for an imputation. Will any one, I ask of you—will any one assert that you are ignorant of all this? Would any one believe who heard it? Will not the tale be rather circulated with all its notes and comments? Will not men fill up every blank by the devices of their own bad ingenuity? Will not some assert that you are a partner in your own infamy, and that your fingers have touched the price of your shame?"

"Stop!" cried Norwood. "Another word—one syllable more like this—and, by the Heaven above us, your lips will never move again!"

"It would be a sorry recompense for my devotion to you, my lord," said the abbé, with a profound sigh.

"Devotion!" repeated Norwood, in a voice of insulting sarcasm; "as if I were to be tricked by this! Keep these artifices for some trembling devotee—some bedridden or palsied worshipper of saintly relics and holy legerdemain; I'm not the stuff for such deceptions!"

"And yet, my lord, what possible benefit can accrue to myself from this ungracious task? With all your ingenuity, what personal gain can result to *me?*"

"What care I for your motives, sir?" responded Norwood, fiercely. "I only know that you had never incurred so critical a hazard without an object. You either seek to exert a menace over *me*, or to be revenged on *her*."

"Alas, my lord, I see how little hope I should have of vindicating myself before you. Your estimate of the Papist suggests nothing above craft and dishonesty. You will not believe that human affections, love of country, and all the other associations of a home, are strong in hearts that beat beneath the serge frock of the priest. Still less do you know the great working principle of our

Faith—the law which binds us, for every unjust act we have done in life, to make an expiation in this world. For many a year has my conscience been burdened with this offence. But for my weak compliance with your request, I should never have performed this ceremony. Had *I* been firm, *you* had been saved. Nay, in my eagerness to serve you, I only worked your ruin; for, on confessing to my Superior what I had done, he at once took measures to ratify the act of marriage, and my rank as a deacon took date from the day before the ceremony." D'Esmonde seemed not to notice the gesture of indignation with which Norwood heard these words, but he went on: "It is, then, to make some requital for this wrong, that I now risk all that your anger may inflict upon me."

"Where is this woman?" cried Norwood, savagely, and as if impatient at a vindication for which he felt no interest. "Where is she?"

"She is here, my lord," said the other, meekly.

"Here? How do you mean? Not in this house?"

"I mean that she is now in Florence."

"What, living openly here?—calling herself by *my* name?"

"She lives in all the splendour of immense wealth, and as openly as the protection of Prince Midchekoff——"

"Midchekoff—Midchekoff, did you say?" cried Norwood, in a burst of passion.

"Yes, my lord. The haughty Russian exults in the insult that this offers to the proudest aristocracy of Europe. This is the vengeance he exacts for the cold disdain he experienced in London, and all that reserve that met his attempts in English society."

"How came she here?—who sent for her?—who devised this scheme? Tell me the whole truth, for, by Heaven, if I see you equivocate, you'll never quit this chamber living!"

"I'll tell you everything, truthfully and fairly," said the abbé, with calm dignity; and now in a few words he traced Nina's life, from the time of her residence under Lady Hester's roof, to the moment of her return to Florence. He omitted nothing; neither her intimacy with Jekyl, nor her passion for George Onslow. Even to the incident of the torn dress on the night of the flight, he told all.

Norwood listened with the stern collectedness of one who had nerved himself for a great effort. Although the blood spurted from his compressed lips, and the nails of his fingers were buried in his hands, he uttered never a word. At last, when D'Esmonde paused, he said,—

"And *you* knew all this?"

"Nothing whatever of it. I never chanced to see her at Florence, nor had I the slightest suspicion of her presence there."

"Lady Hester knew it? Miss Dalton knew it?"

"I suspect not, at that time."

"They know it *now*, then?"

"Who does not? Is not Florence ringing with the story? When has scandal fallen upon such material for its malevolence? Such *dramatis personæ* as a prince, an English peer, and his peeress, are not of every day's good fortune!"

"Be cautious how you harp on this theme, priest. In your good zeal to hammer the metal soft, you may chance to crush your own finger."

"I must be frank with you, my lord, whatever the hazard. He would be a sorry surgeon who, after giving his patient all the agony of the knife, stopped short, and left the malady unextirpated."

"Come, now, D'Esmonde," said Norwood, as with a strong grasp he drew the other down on the sofa beside him, "*you* have your debt to acquit in this matter as well as myself. I do not seek to know how, or why, or upon whom. Your priestly craft need not be called into exercise—I want nothing of your secrets—I only ask your counsel. That much in our common cause you cannot refuse me. What shall I do in this affair? No cant—no hypocritical affectation of Christian forgiveness—none of that hackneyed advice that you dole out to your devotees; speak freely, and like a man of the world. What is to be done here?"

"If the marriage admitted of dispute or denial, I should say, disavow it," said the priest. "It is too late for this."

"Go on. What next?"

"Then comes the difficulty. To assert your own honour, you must begin by a recognition of her, as your wife.

This looks rash, but I see no other course. You cannot call Midchekoff to a reckoning on any other grounds. Then comes the question, is such a woman worth fighting for? or must the only consideration be the fact that she bears your name, and that she is the Viscountess Norwood in every society she can enter? How is this to be borne? The stricter code of England rejects such claimants altogether from its circle, but, on the continent, they are everywhere. Will it be possible for you to live under this open shame?"

"Your advice is, then—shoot him!" said Norwood; and he bent his eyes fixedly on the priest as he spoke. "It is my own notion, also. If the choice were open to me, D'Esmonde, I'd rather have exacted the payment of this debt from Onslow; I hated the fellow from my very heart. Not that I owe this Russian any good will. We have more than once been on the verge of a quarrel. It was not my fault if it went no further. They say, too, that he has no taste for these things. If so, one must stimulate his appetite, that's all!—eh, D'Esmonde? *Your* countrymen seldom need such provocations?"

"We have our faults, my lord; but this is scarcely amongst their number."

"You're right, D'Esmonde," said the other, pursuing his former line of thought. "It's no petty penalty to exact from a fellow with fifty thousand a year! I almost fancy I should have been a coward myself at such a price!"

"You'll have some difficulty in obtaining access to him, my lord," remarked the abbé. "He lives in strict privacy, and refuses admission to every one."

"But a letter will reach him?"

"It may, or it may not; besides, it may come to hand, and yet never be acknowledged."

"What is to be done, then?"

"I'll think over it, before we separate. I'll try and suggest something. But here comes Morlache; and now be cautious. Not a word to show that you are ill at ease." The warning was scarcely spoken, when the Jew entered.

Morlache knew D'Esmonde too well to be surprised at seeing him anywhere, or at any moment. He saluted him, therefore, as though they had met the very day before, and the party sat down to supper, in all the seeming ease of unburdened minds.

They chatted over the politics of Italy, and the change that had come over Florence since the last time they had sat together in that chamber.

"It was a noisy scene, that night," said Morlache; "but the streets are quiet enough now."

"Quiet as a corpse," said Norwood, sternly. "You had no other nostrum for tranquillity but to extinguish life."

"What you regard as death, my lord," said the abbé, "is only a trance. Italy will rise grander and more powerful than ever. One element alone has survived through all the convulsive throes, and all the changing fortunes of this land—the papacy. The terrible wars of rival cities and states—the more bloody conquests of ambitious houses—leave not a trace behind them; but Rome holds on her proud way, and, like the great river of the poet—'Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis œvum.'"

"To which I beg, in a less classical quotation, to rejoin—'Confound your politics,'" cried Norwood, laughing. "Come, Morlache, let us turn to a humbler theme. Who have you got here—who are coming for the winter?"

"Say, rather, my lord, who are going away; for there is a general flight from Florence. All what hotel folk call good families are hastening off to Rome and Naples."

"What's the meaning of this, then?"

"It is not very difficult, perhaps, to explain," said the Jew; "luxuries are only the creations of mere circumstance. The rarity of one land may be the very satiety of another; and the iced-punch that tastes so exquisite at Calcutta would be but sorry tipple at Coppermine River. Hence you will see, my lord, that the English who come here for wickedness find the place too bad for them. There is no zest to their vice—they shock nobody—they outrage nothing—in fact, they are only as bad as their neighbours."

"I suppose it's neither better nor worse than I remember it these dozen years and more?" said Norwood.

"Probably not, my lord, in fact; but, in outward appearance, it has assuredly degenerated; people behave badly everywhere, but this is the only city in Europe where it is deemed right to do so."

"Since when have you taken up the trade of moralist, Master Morlache?" said Norwood, with a sneer.

"*I*'ll answer that question," broke in D'Esmonde. "Since the exchange on England has fallen to forty-three and a half, Morlache sees his clients diminish, and is consequently as angry with vice as he had been with its opposite, if the same result had come to pass."

"I own," said the Jew, with a sneer, "the present order of things is far more profitable to the confessional than to the *comptoir*."

"That's the truth, I've no doubt of it," broke in Norwood, laughing. "A low tariff has given a great impulse to the trade of wickedness."

"Taking your own illustration, my lord, we are 'Protectionists,'" said D'Esmonde, "whereas you Protestants are the 'Free-traders' in vice."

"A plague on both your houses, say I," cried Norwood, yawning. "So, then, Morlache, neither you nor I would find this a desirable residence?"

"I fear it will not repay either of us, my lord," said the Jew, with a sly look.

"The world is growing wonderfully wide awake," said Norwood. "When I entered life, any fellow with a neat hand at billiards, a fair knowledge of écarté or short whist, good whiskers, and a well-cut waistcoat, might have eked out a pretty existence without any risk, and very little exertion. But see what the march of intelligence has done! There's not an Eton boy—not an unfledged 'sub' in a marching regiment—not an unpaid attaché at a small court—couldn't compete with you now in any of these high acquirements. I do not fret myself usually about what is to come after *my* time, but I really wonder how the next generation will get on at all."

"Civilization moves like the pendulum, my lord," said D'Esmonde; "the next swing will be retrograde. And, by the way, that reminds me of Russia, and Russia of Prince Midchekoff. Is it true that he is recalled, Morlache?"

"Not that I know. That report is always circulated when there are no dinners at the villa. Just as Marshal

Soult is said to have won or lost the battle of Toulouse according to the momentary estimation he is held in."

"You'll hear for certain, my lord," said D'Esmonde, addressing Norwood; "you are going up there to-night?"

Norwood muttered an assent, and waited to see how this sally was to end.

"Ah! you are going there to-night," repeated Morlache, in some surprise. "Are *you* one of the privileged, then?"

"Of course he is," interposed D'Esmonde, authoritatively.

"Will you do me a very great favour, then, my lord?" said Morlache, "which is to take charge of this small casket. I promised to take it myself, but it is so late now, and I am so wearied, that I shall feel much bound to you for the service."

"You can easily acquit the debt of obligation, Morlache," said D'Esmonde, "for my lord was just asking me, before you came in, if he could take the liberty of begging the loan of your carriage to take him up to the Moskova. You are aware that it would not be quite proper to take a hired carriage, just now, up to the villa; that, as the prince affects to be absent——"

"To be sure," broke in Morlache. "I am but too happy to accommodate your lordship. Your precaution was both delicate and well thought of. Indeed, I greatly doubt that they would admit a fiacre at all."

"I suppose I should have had to walk from the gate," said Norwood, who now saw the gist of the abbé's stratagem.

"Morlache's old grey is a passport that requires no *visa*," said D'Esmonde. "You'll meet neither let nor hindrance with him in front of you. You may parody the great statesman's peroration, and say, 'Where the King cannot enter, he can.' Such is it to be a banker's horse!"

Norwood heard little or nothing of this remark; deeply sunk in his own thoughts, he arose abruptly from the table.

"You are not going away, my lord? You are surely not deserting that flask of Marçobrunner, that we have only tasted?"

But Norwood never heard the words, and continued to follow his own train of reflection. Then, bending over D'Esmonde, he said: "In case we should require to cross the frontier at Lavenza, must we have passports?"

"Nothing of the kind. There is no police—no inquiry whatever."

"Good-bye, then. If you should not hear *from*, you will hear *of* me, abbé. There are a few things, which, in the event of accident, I will jot down in writing. You'll look to them for me. Good evening, or good morning—I scarcely know which." And, with all the habitual indolence of his lounging manner, he departed.

D'Esmonde stood for a few seconds silent, and then said, "Is the noble viscount deep in your books?"

"Deeper than I wish him to be," said the Jew.

"Have no fears on that account. He'll soon acquit all his debts," said the other. "Good night, Morlache." And with this abrupt leave-taking he withdrew.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SAD EXIT.

THE French Secretary of Legation was just going to bed as his servant handed him a card from Lord Norwood, with a few words scribbled in pencil.

"Yes, by all means. Tell my lord to come in," said he; and Norwood entered.

"You remember an old pledge you once made me," said the viscount, smiling. "I have come to claim it."

"*Diantre!* the case must be pressing that would not wait till daylight."

"So it is; and so you will agree with me in thinking it, when I tell you all," said Norwood. "The first point is, may I reckon upon you?"

"Of course; my word is sacred."

"Secondly, have you pistols that you can depend upon? Mine have been stopped at Milan by the police."

"They are Jacquard's best," said the Frenchman; "and in *your* hand ought not to disgrace their maker."

"Dress, then, and come along with me. This affair must be disposed of quickly."

"I'm at your orders," said the Frenchman, gaily. "I suppose you will be kind enough to tell me something more, as we go along."

Norwood nodded an assent, and sat down before the fire, and crossed his arms on his breast.

"Was it a quarrel at play?" asked the Frenchman, after an interval of silence.

"No!" was the abrupt reply.

"All the better. It is the only affair of this kind I cannot endure. Is there a woman in it?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I perceive," said the other, with a laugh. "A married woman?"

"Yes."

"And who is this happy husband, this time?" asked he, flippantly.

"I am," replied Norwood, in a low and solemn voice.

"*You! you!* I never thought—never suspected *you* of being married, Norwood. Pray, be a little more explicit. Let me hear the whole story."

"Later on, not now. I want to think of something else, at this moment. Are your pistols fine in the trigger?"

"Excessively so; a fly would almost suffice to move them. Is he English?"

"No."

"Not a countryman of my own, I hope?"

"No. It is Midchekoff, the Russian."

"*Diantre!* what a mark to shoot at! But they tell me that he never does go out—that he refuses this kind of thing."

"He shall not do so this time," said Norwood, with a vehement energy of manner.

"Well, I'm ready now; but I must say that I should like to hear something of what we are about."

"There will be ample time for all as we go along. We shall drive to the villa. It is necessary to obtain an interview with himself. This done, I will give the provocation, showing that you are ready and in waiting; there can be no delay."

"But he will need a friend?"

"He must take one of his secretaries—his valet if he prefer it. I'll give no time for evasive negotiation."

"I cannot be a party to an affair like this, Norwood. Whatever the wrong you seek to avenge, this is not the mode to do it."

"Say so at once, then," said Norwood, rising. "Tell me that you gave a rash promise, and are sorry for it. Better the refusal now, than when it be too late to retract."

"You mistake me; I have no wish to unsay one single word I ever spoke to you. I only ask for such an explanation as I have a right to demand."

"You shall know everything: pray spare me telling it twice over. There is no use in opening one's wound till he comes to the surgeon. Enough now, that I tell you this man owes me a full and fair reparation for a great wrong—I am equally determined on exacting it. If this does not satisfy you, step into the carriage, and you shall hear the whole story. I can tell it, perhaps, when we are rattling along over the stones in the dark." And, so saying, he sat down, and leaned his head on the table, as though he would not be disturbed. The Frenchman went on with his dressing, rapidly, and at last, pronouncing himself ready, they descended the stairs together in silence, and entered the carriage.

As they drove on, Norwood never spoke; and his companion, respecting perhaps the occasion of his silence, did not utter a word. At last they arrived at the summit of the hill, and looked down upon the city, over which the grey tints of coming day were breaking. The great Duomo and the Palazzo Vecchio lay in massive shadow, and it was only at intervals along the Arno that a flickering gleam of cold light fell. The scene, in all its calm and stillness, was grand and solemn.

"How unlike the Florence of sun and bright sky—how unlike the brilliant city of dissipation and pleasure!" said Norwood; "and so it is with individuals; we are just what light and shadow make us! Now, listen to me." He then related the whole story of his first meeting with Lola, down to the moment of D'Esmonde's revelation. "I know well," said he, "there may be a dozen ways to look on the affair, besides that which I have chosen. I might dispute the marriage—I might disavow the whole proceeding—I might, naturally enough, leave such a woman to her fate; she never could be anything to *me;* but I cannot relinquish the opportunity of a reckoning with this Russian. The insolence of his wealth gives all the venom to this outrage, and I'll shoot him! All the splendour of his riches can avail him but little now. And, except some more gold upon his coffin, and a richer pall to cover it, he has no advantage over me, ruined and beggared as I am. As to my scores with the world at large, I am about quits. *They* cheated *me* when I was a young, unsuspecting boy, trusting and believing every one. *I* repaid *them*, as my own time came. Men understand this thoroughly, but women never do. The moment you cease to be *their* dupe, they hate you. As to my debts, they gave me little trouble when living, they're not likely to disturb my rest in the churchyard; and as for friends, there is not one alive to whom I could send a last word of affection; and yet—you'll scarcely believe it—with all this, I'd like to live; although if you ask me why, I couldn't tell it. Perhaps it is this," cried he, after a pause; "the yelping pack that cried me down in my absence will do so now without fear or restraint. The stories of me that once were whispered will now be told aloud. Slander and calumny can go abroad without a dread of consequences. But even that is a poor thing to live for!"

The Frenchman's philosophy had taught him but few sympathies with such gloomy ideas, and he tried in every way to rally his friend; but Norwood's mind was full of very different sorrows from those he had dwelt upon. It was the canker of a disappointed, abortive life was eating into his heart. A fair fortune squandered—a noble name tarnished—a high position sacrificed—and now, an ignominious quarrel to close his career—these were the reflections which, far more embittering than all his words, now tortured and agonized him.

"Come," said he, suddenly, "we had better move forward. It is getting nigh daybreak, and our prince will soon be retiring to his room."

They now drove rapidly on for some time, and at last reached the gate; where the porter, at once recognizing Morlache's carriage and livery, admitted them without a word.

"You'll have to wait for me here, count," said Norwood, when they stopped at the door. "I'll contrive not to keep you long; but this part of the matter I must do alone." The bell had scarcely done ringing when the door was opened. "The prince is still at table?" said Norwood, half in assertion half in inquiry; and then, with a gesture to the servant to show the way, he overawed all scruples about admitting him. "Is he alone?" said the viscount, as they went along.

"No, sir. The countess is with him."

"Say that a person on most pressing business is here, and must speak with him at once."

"The prince always requires the name, sir. I dare not address him without it."

"Say that I am come from Morlache's—that I have something to deliver into his own hands."

Norwood placed the casket on the table as he spoke. The servant retired, and speedily returned, requesting Norwood to follow him. As the door was flung open, Norwood heard voices; he stopped and hesitated. Either an impulse of passion, or some change of purpose, worked within him, for, as he stood, he grasped the edge of the door, and swayed to and fro for some seconds.

"Let him come out—let him come here," cried he, in a loud voice.

A low murmur of persons speaking was heard within, and suddenly the rustling sound of a female dress was followed by the bang of a door; and then Norwood entered, and, closing the door, locked it behind him.

The grating sound of the key made the Russian turn his head suddenly around, and his eyes met Norwood's.

"What! my Lord Norwood!" cried he, in amazement. "They never told me——"

"If they had, in all likelihood I should not have been admitted," was the stern reply.

"I must own it is an honour for which I was scarcely prepared, my lord," said the other.

"You never spoke more truly, sir," said Norwood. "Men like yourself fancy that their solvency in matters of money implies as much in all the various relations of life, and that, as they know not what a dun means, they are to enjoy an equal immunity from every demand of honour."

"As you are evidently speaking under some strange misapprehension, my lord, I hesitate about accepting your words in any offensive sense."

"You said you were unprepared for my visit, sir, and I believe you, as you will be, doubtless, unprepared for the object of it. Prince Midchekoff, I have come here to request your company across the Tuscan frontier; the matter is of sufficient importance to warrant the inconvenience. You will take any or as many of your household as you please, but you shall accompany me from this spot. Come, sir, your air of easy indifference is for once mistimed. You see before you a man whose utmost effort can scarcely repress the passion that stirs within him.

Neither your coolness nor your cowardice—for the quality goes by either name—can avail you here. I must and I will have reparation."

"Until I am aware of the injury—until you tell me how, or in what, I have wronged you——"

"How shall I teach you a lesson of honour, sir," cried Norwood, boiling over with rage, "so that you may comprehend, even for a moment, the feeling of a gentleman? You cannot affect ignorance as to who and what is the woman that sat there. You need not drive me to the indignity of calling her my wife! You know it well, and you knew all the disgrace you were heaping on a class who rejected your intimacy. None of this mock surprise, sir! If you compel me to it, I'll fling open that door, call all your household around you, and before them I'll insult you, so that even your serf-blood will rebel against the outrage."

"This is madness—downright insanity, my lord," said Midchekoff, rising and moving towards the bell.

"Not so, sir," said Norwood, interposing. "My passion is now mastered. You shall not escape on that pretence. There are my pistols—only one of them is loaded—take your choice, for I see that outside of this room I shall seek in vain for satisfaction."

"This would be a murder."

"It shall be, by Heaven, if you delay!" cried Norwood. "I have the right and the will to shoot you like a dog. If there be no honour, is there not even some manhood in your heart? Take your weapon—you hesitate still—take that, then!" And he struck him with his open hand across the face.

Midchekoff snatched the pistol convulsively, and, placing the muzzle on Norwood's breast, fired. With a wild cry, he staggered, and fell dead upon the floor. The prince flung open the door, and rang the bell violently. In a moment the room was filled with servants. "Send Jocasse here," said Midchekoff; and his chief secretary entered in all haste and trepidation. "This is an affair for the police, Jocasse," said the prince, coolly. "Send for the brigadier, and let him come to my room."

"Suicide shows a great *manque de savoir vivre*," said

Haggerstone, as the news of the event was circulated through Florence. And the *mot* survived the memory of its victim.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SUMMONS.

THEY who only knew Vienna in its days of splendour and magnificence could scarcely have recognized that city as it appeared on the conclusion of the great revolt which had just convulsed the empire. The great walls were riddled with shot and shell; vast breaches in them opened out a view of even more dreadful ruin within; streets choked up with fallen houses, and wide squares encumbered with blocks of masonry and blackened timbers. The terrible traces of barricade struggles still remained; but more significant than all these was the downcast, sorrow-struck look of a population once known as the gayest and most light-hearted of Europe!

The air of suffering and poverty extended to everything. No signs of the once luxury and wealth of that rich nobility. Not an equipage was to be seen! The passing and repassing of troops gave the only movement observable in the streets. Strong guards and patrols marched past, with all the precaution and preparation of a state of war. The dragoons sat in their saddles, carbine in hand, as if but waiting for a signal to engage; while, in the half-defiant stare of the populace might be read the spirit of men who had not yet resigned themselves to defeat.

Most of the shops were closed, and, even of those still open, the display of wares was scanty and miserable; rather seeming as if the effort were made to conciliate the favour of the Government, than with any hope of gain. The cafés were deserted, except by the military, and they—far from indulging the jocund mirth and laughter which was their wont—were now serious and anxious-looking, regarding the passers-by with a distrustful glance, and seeming as though they felt that the interval was less peace than an armistice.

Cannon were in position on the Stephan's Platz and the Graben, and the gunners stood ready, as if on parade. Officers of the staff, too, and orderlies, rode hastily to and fro, showing that no rash reliance was placed on the quietude of the capital, and that the hour of conflict, if it were to come, should not find them unprepared. In vain the stranger might have sought for that more than feudal splendour which once was the type of this brilliant city! The gorgeous liveries of the Bohemian—or the more tasteful grandeur of the Magyar noble, were no longer to be seen. The varied costumes of the Banat and the Wallach, which gave such character to many a rude equipage—the barbaric finery, which recalled the old struggles with the Crescent, which marked the rank of some border chieftain—was gone! Vienna presented nothing but its troops of soldiers, and its mournful, sad-looking population, moving listlessly about, or standing in groups to gaze on the disastrous ruins of their once proud city!

The "Ambassador Street," where formerly the armorial shields of every reigning house of Europe were wont to be displayed, was now almost untenanted.

With some, the Imperial Government was at open war; with others, estrangement and coldness prevailed; while some, again, were represented by officials of inferior rank—all signs of troubled and precarious times, when kings no longer knew what future awaited them!

It was here, formerly, that the most brilliant society of the capital was to be found; here, every night, the carriages were seen to throng, and the whole street glow with the glare of light from brilliant *salons*, or the red flame of the torches borne by the running footmen. The proud aristocracy of every land here met; and names that recalled the great achievements of generals and statesmen were heard in every announcement that resounded along those corridors! But a few of these palaces were now occupied, and for the most part were the quarters of the generals of the army. In front of one of the largest, at whose gate two sentinels stood, the street was littered with straw, while the closed shutters and drawn curtains showed that sickness and suffering were busy within. The frequent arrivals, and the passing and repassing of messengers, evinced the interest the sufferer's fate excited; and amongst those who dismounted at the corner of the street, and with cautious steps approached the door, more than one member of the imperial house was to be seen. He whose fortune inspired all these tokens of regard was no great or illustrious general, no proud and distinguished statesman—he was simply a young officer of hussars—a gallant soldier, whose fidelity had been proved under the most trying circumstances—our old acquaintance, Frank Dalton. Relapse after relapse had reduced his strength to the very verge of debility, and each day threatened to be his last. Worn down by pain and suffering, the young soldier bore a look of calm and even happy meaning. His character for loyalty had been not only vindicated by his blood, but, through the aid of Walstein, it was shown that he could have known nothing of the conspiracy with which he was charged. Thus re-established in fair fame, he saw himself the object of every care that affection could bestow. The old count seldom quitted him—Kate never left his bedside. Every attention of kindness, every suggestion of love, was bestowed upon him; and a sick bed was made the scene of more touching happiness than he had ever known in the proudest hours of his health and vigour. Could he have seen his dear Nelly beside him, he had no more to wish for! To die, without pressing her to his heart, without acknowledging all that he owed to her good counsels, was now his only sorrow; and if, in the stillness of the sick room, tears would flow heavily along his cheek, and drop, one by one, on his pillow, this was their secret source.

The count had himself written to Nelly. Kate, too, had despatched a letter, telling of Frank's dangerous condition, and entreating her presence; but no reply had been returned, and they already began to fear that some mishap had occurred, and were obliged to frame all manner of excuses for her absence. Meanwhile, as his strength declined, his impatience increased, and his first question, as day broke, and his last, at night, were, "What tidings of Nelly?" All his faults and errors lay like a load upon his heart, till he could pour out the confession to his dear sister.

The post-hour of each morning was a moment of intense anxiety to him, and the blank look which met his eager glance was the signal for a depression that weighed down his heart during the day. From long dwelling on this source of sorrow, his mind grew painfully acute as to all that bore upon it; and sometimes he fancied that his uncle and Kate knew some dreadful fact of poor Nelly, and feared to communicate it. More than once had it occurred to him that she was dead—that she had sunk, broken-hearted and deserted! He did not dare to whisper this suspicion, but he tried to insinuate his fears about her in a hundred ways. To his sickly fancy, their frankness seemed dissimulation, and the very grief they displayed he read as the misery of an unrevealed calamity!

Kate, with all a woman's quickness, saw what was passing in his mind, and tried her utmost to combat it; but all in vain. To no purpose did she open her whole heart before him, telling of her own sad history and its disappointments. In vain did she point to a bright future, when, strong and in spirits, Frank should accompany her in search of Nelly through every glen and valley of the Tyrol. The impression of some concealment was more powerful than all these, and he but heard them as tales invented to amuse a sick bed. The morbid sensibility of illness gave a significance to every trivial incident, and Kate dared not whisper in his presence, nor even exchange a look with another, without exciting a whole flood of doubt and suspicion in his mind.

To allay, so far as might be, these disordered terrors, they assumed the utmost frankness in all intercourse with him, and even took pains to exhibit an undisguised freedom on every occasion.

The letters which arrived by each morning's post were always opened in his presence, and his prying, eager glances showed that the precaution was not unneeded.

"What is that?" cried he, suddenly, as Kate, after reading the address of a letter, hastily threw it on the table, and covered it with others. "Let me see that, Kate. Who is it for?"

"It bears your name," said she, anxiously, "and has an Irish postmark; but the hand is not known to me."

The youth took the letter in his hand, and sat gazing on it for some minutes together.

"No," said he, at length, "I do not remember to have seen the writing before. Read it, Kate."

She broke the seal, and at once exclaimed, "It is from Doctor Grounsell, Frank—a very dear and kind friend."

She ran her eyes rapidly over the lines as she spoke, and twice her colour came and went, and her hand trembled as it held the paper.

"You have bad news for me?" said the boy, with a slow, but firm utterance, "but so that it be not of Nelly, I can bear anything!"

"It is not of Nelly," said Kate, in a tremulous voice.

"Then let me hear it," said he, calmly.

She tried to read, but the effort was beyond her strength; and, although her lips moved, no sound issued from them. At last she gained sufficient strength to say, "It would agitate you too much, my dear brother, to hear this now. Let us wait for a day or two, till you are stronger, and better able to think about it."

"I have told you already, that if it be not of Nelly, I can hear it with indifference. Read on, then, Kate."

"The meaning of it is this, Frank," cried she, hastily. "There was a fearful crime committed some years back in Ireland—a relative of ours, named Godfrey, was murdered."

"Yes—yes—I know it. Go on," said he, eagerly.

"The circumstances have never come to light, and now, it would appear, some efforts are being made to connect our name with this dreadful act; and—and—in fact, Frank, Doctor Grounsell wishes to learn from you where we were residing at the period in question; and if you be possessed of any letters or papers which could show the relations existing between our family and Mr. Godfrey."

"You must let me read this for myself, Kate," said Frank, calmly, taking the letter from her hands; "and now leave me for a while."

"With trembling steps and a sinking heart the young girl retired, to pass hours of intense anxiety in her chamber. At last came a servant to say that her brother desired to see her.

"I must set out for Ireland, Kate," said the sick youth, as he arose from his chair.

"For Ireland!" cried she, gazing with terror at his wasted and worn figure.

"A long journey, dearest, but I shall have strength for it, if you'll be my companion!"

"Never to leave you, Frank," cried she; and fell sobbing into his arms.

CHAPTER XXXII.

INISTIOGE.

Rich as Ireland is in picturesque river scenery, we know nothing more beautiful than the valley through which the Nore flows between Thomastown and New Ross. The gently sloping meadows, backed by deep woods, and dotted with cheerful farm-houses, gradually give way to a bolder landscape as you descend the stream and enter a dark gorge, whose high beetling sides throw their solemn shade over the river, receding at last to form a kind of amphitheatre wherein stands the little village of Inistioge.

More like a continental than an Irish hamlet, the cottages are built around a wide open space planted with tall elms and traversed by many a footpath; and here, of a summer night, are to be seen the villagers seated or strolling about in pleasant converse—a scene of rural peace and happiness such as rarely is to be met with in our land of trial and struggle. Did our time or space admit of it, we would gladly loiter in that pleasant spot, gazing from that graceful bridge on the ivy-clad towers, the tall and stately abbey, or the rich woods of that proud demesne, which in every tint of foliage encircles the picture.

That "vale and winding river" were scenes of some of our boyhood's happiest hours, and even years—those stern teachers—have not obliterated the memory! Our task is not, however, with these recollections, and we would now ask our reader to stand with us beneath the shadow of the tall elms, while the little village is locked in slumber.

It is past midnight—all is still and tranquil—a faint moonlight flickers through the leaves and plays a fitful gleam upon the river: one man alone is abroad, and he is seen to traverse the bridge with uncertain steps, stopping at moments as if to listen, and then resuming his solitary watch. A light, the only one in the village, twinkles from a window of the little inn, and the door lies open, for in his impatience he has quitted his chamber to walk abroad in the night air. As the hours wear on, his anxiety seems to increase, and he starts and pauses at every sound of the wind through the trees, and every cadence of the rushing river. At last he hears the tramp of a horse—he bends down to listen—it comes nearer and nearer, and in his feverish impatience he hastens in the direction of the coming noise—"Is that you, Michel?" he cries, in an eager accent.

"Yes, D'Esmonde, it is I," replies a voice; and the next moment the horseman has dismounted at his side.

"What have I not suffered since you left this, Michel!" said D'Esmonde, as he rested his forehead on the other's shoulder. "There is not an image of terror my mind has not conjured up. Shame, ignominy, ruin, were all before me, and had you stayed much longer away, my brain could not have borne it."

"But, D'Esmonde, my friend——"

"Nay, nay, do not reason with me; what I feel—what I suffer—has no relation to the calm influences of reason. I alone can pilot myself through the rocks and quicksands of this channel. Tell me of your mission—how has it fared?"

"Less well than I hoped for," said the other, slowly.

"I thought as much," replied D'Esmonde, in a tone of deep dejection. "You saw him?"

"Yes, our interview lasted nigh an hour. He received me coldly, but courteously, and entered into the question with a kind of calm acquiescence that at first gave me good encouragement."

"To end in disappointment!" cried D'Esmonde, bitterly; and the other made no reply. "Go on, Michel," said the abbé, after a pause; "tell me all."

"I began," resumed the other, "by a brief reference to Godfrey's murder, and the impenetrable mystery in which, up to this hour, it would appear to be veiled. I related all that you had told me of the relationship between him and the Daltons, and the causes which had broken off their friendship. With these he seemed conversant, though I am unable to say whether he knew more or less than what I was communicating. I dwelt as long and as forcibly as I deemed safe on the character and habits of old Dalton, hinting at his reckless, unprincipled career, and the wild and lawless notions he entertained on every subject. To my great surprise, and I confess to my discomfiture, he stopped me short by saying,—

"'You would imply, then, that he was the guilty man.'

"'You go too fast, Mr. Grounsell,' said I, calmly; 'I have come to confer and take counsel with you, not to form rash or hasty notions on a matter of such deep gravity. If the circumstances I shall lay before you possess the same importance in your eyes that they do in mine, it may be that your own conclusions will be even more than suspicious.' I then entered upon the story of Meekins, and how a comrade of his, an Irishman, called Noonan, confessed to him that he was the murderer of Mr. Godfrey; that he had never known him, nor had any intercourse with him; but was employed for the act by old Dalton, who was then residing at Bruges. This Noonan, who was possessed of several letters of Dalton's, had joined a Genoese vessel, fitted out for the slave-trade, and was killed in action. Meekins had frequent conversations with him on the subject of the murder, and, although a stranger from another country, knew every detail of the scene and locality perfectly from description.

"'Meekins is still living?' asked Doctor Grounsell.

"'Living, and now here,' replied I; at which he gave a start of surprise, and, I think, of alarm.

"'Is he ready to substantiate his statement on oath?' said he.

"'That he could do so, I have no doubt,' replied I; 'that he will, or that he ought, is perhaps a matter for calm reflection.'

"'How do you mean?' said he, hastily. 'If what he alleges be true, can there be any hesitation as to its publicity?'

"'On that there may be grave doubts, sir,' said I. 'They whom the law could have held responsible are already gone before another judgment seat. Their guilt or innocence has been proven where deception or error exist not! It is only their blameless descendants that could now pay the penalty of their crime; and it may well be matter for consideration whether they should be exposed to the world's shame, to expiate that wherein they had no share——'

"'Do you yourself believe this man's story?' asked he, abruptly.

"'I see no reason to discredit it,' was my answer. 'There are moments when doubt is more difficult than belief, and this is one of them. He has never varied in his narrative—he tells it to-day as he told it yesterday—he details family circumstances that defy invention, and mentions events and incidents that all tally with facts.'

"'Where was he himself at the time of the murder?'

"'In South America,' he says. 'He had joined one of those patriot expeditions which sailed from Ireland to join Bolivar.'

"'This he can prove, of course?' observed he, shrewdly.

"'I conclude he can,' replied I; 'it never occurred to me to question it.'

"There was an interval after this, in which neither of us spoke; at last he said, 'May I ask how you became acquainted with this man—Meekins?'

"'Through a brother clergyman, who was the means of saving his life abroad.'

"'And the intention is,' rejoined he, in a slow and deliberate voice, 'that we should, while believing this man's statement, keep it secret? Would not that amount to a very grave offence—the compromise of a felony?'

"I hesitated as he said this, not knowing well which way the discussion might turn; at last I replied, 'Meekins might refuse his evidence—he might deny that he had ever made these revelations.'

"'In other words,' said he, 'he prefers to sell his testimony for a better price than a court of justice would pay for it.'

"'You do not suppose that I could be a party to——'

"'Nay, nay,' cried he, interrupting me, 'not on such grounds as these; but I can well conceive your feeling strongly interested for the blameless and unhappy children. The only question is, how far such sympathies can be indulged against the direct claims of justice.'

"There was a dispassionate calmness in the tone he spoke this, that disarmed my suspicions, D'Esmonde; and it was only when I had left him and was on my way back here, that I perceived what may, perhaps, have been a very great error; for I at once proceeded to lay before him the course I would counsel, and how, by the employment of a very moderate sum, this fellow could be induced to emigrate to America, never to return. After pushing this view with all the force I could, I at last avowed, as if driven to the confession, that another motive had also its weight with me, which was, that my friend and brother priest—the same who rescued Meekins from his fate—was the natural son of Mr. Godfrey, educated and brought up at his cost, and maintained till the period of his death with every requisite of rank and station; that Meekins knew this fact, and would publish it to the world, if provoked to it, and that thus my friend's position at the court of Rome would be utterly ruined.

"'He is a Monsignore, then?' asked Grounsell.

"'He is,' replied I, 'and may even yet be more than that.'"

"This was rash, Michel—this was all imprudence," said D'Esmonde, with a heavy sigh. "Go on; what said he then?"

"He waited while I told him that we sought for no advantages on the score of this relationship; that we preferred no claims whatever against the estate of Mr. Godfrey; that we only sought to bury in oblivion a great crime, and to prevent the publicity of a great shame.

"'It is your belief, then,' said he, staring me fully in the face, 'that Dalton was guilty?'

"'From what is before me,' replied I, 'it is hard to reject that conclusion.'

"'And that this was an act of pure revenge?'

"'Less that, perhaps, than the hope of succeeding to the property by some will of early date; at least, such is the version Meekins's informant gave him.'

"'Ay, ay,' said he, 'that would constitute a motive, of course. Your advice is, then, that we should make terms with this fellow? Is this also your friend's counsel?'

"'I scarcely can tell you,' replied I. 'My friend is not in any sense a worldly man. His whole thoughts are centred in the cause he serves, and he could only see good or evil in its working on the Church. If his cousins——'

"'His cousins!'

"'Yes, the Daltons—for they are such—deem this the fitting course, he is ready to adopt it. If they counsel differently, I can almost answer for his compliance.'

"'You can give me time to communicate with Dalton? He is at Vienna.'

"'Yes, if you agree with me in this view of the case, and think that such will be Dalton's opinion also; otherwise it will be difficult to secure this fellow's secrecy much longer. He knows that he is in possession of a deeply important fact; he feels the impunity of his own position; and to-morrow or next day he may threaten this, that, or t'other. In fact, he believes that Lady Hester Onslow herself has no title to the estate, if he were disposed to reveal all he knows.'

"'Can I see him?' asked Grounsell.

"'Of course you can; but it would be useless. He would affect an utter ignorance of everything, and deny all knowledge of what we have been talking.'

"'You will give me some hours to think over this?' asked he, after a pause.

"'I had rather that you could come to a quicker resolve,' said I; 'the fellow's manner is menacing and obtrusive. I have perhaps too long delayed this visit to you; and should he suspect that we are hesitating, he may go before a magistrate, and make his deposition before we are aware of it.'

"'You shall hear from me this evening, sir. Where shall I address my note?'

"'The Rev. Michel Cahill—the Inn, at Inistioge,' replied I. And so we parted."

"We must leave this at once, Michel," said D'Esmonde, after a brief interval of silence. "Grounsell may possibly come over here himself. He must not see me; still less must he meet with Meekins. We have gone too fast here—much too fast."

"But you told me that we had not a moment to lose."

"Nor have we, Michel; but it is as great an error to overrun your game as to lag behind the scent. I distrust this doctor."

"So do I, D'Esmonde. But what can he do?"

"We must quit this place," said the other, not heeding the question. "There is a small wayside public, called the 'Rore,' about five miles away. We can wait there for a day, at least. I almost wish that we had never embarked in this, Michel," said he, thoughtfully. "I am seldom faint-hearted, but I feel I know not what of coming peril. You know well that this fellow Meekins is not to be depended on. When he drinks, he would reveal any and everything. I myself cannot determine whether to credit or reject his testimony. His insolence at one moment, his slavish, abject terror at another, puzzle and confound me."

"You have been too long an absentee from Ireland, D'Esmonde, or they would present no difficulties to your judgment. At every visit I make to our county gaol I meet with the self-same natures, torn, as it were, by opposite influences—the passions of this world, and the terrors of that to come."

"Without the confessional, who could read them!" exclaimed D'Esmonde.

"How true that is!" cried the other. "What false interpretations, what mistaken views, are taken of them! And so is it—we, who alone know the channel, are never to be the pilots!"

"Say not so," broke in D'Esmonde, proudly. "We are, and we shall be! Ours will be the guidance, not alone of them, but of those who rule them. Distrust what you will, Michel, be faint-hearted how you may, but never despair of the glorious Church. Her triumph is already assured. Look at Austria, at Spain, at all Northern Italy. Look at Protestant Prussia, trembling for the fate of her Rhine provinces. Look at England herself, vacillating between the game of conciliation and the perils of her unlimited bigotry. Where are we not victorious? Ours is the only despotism that ever smote two-handed—crushing a monarchy here, and a people there—proclaiming divine right, or asserting the human inheritance of freedom! Whose banner but ours ever bore the double insignia of rule and obedience?—ours, the great Faith, equal to every condition of mankind, and to every age and every people? Never, never despair of it!"

D'Esmonde sat down, and covered his face with his hands; and when he arose, his pale features and bloodless lips showed the strong reaction from a paroxysm of intense passion.

"Let us leave this, Michel," said he, in a broken voice. "The little inn I speak of is not too distant for a walk, and if we start at once we shall reach it before daybreak. While you awake Meekins, and arrange all within, I will stroll slowly on before." And, thus saying, D'Esmonde moved away, leaving the others to follow.

D'Esmonde was more than commonly thoughtful, even to depression. He had been but a few days in Ireland, but every hour of that time had revealed some new disappointment to him. There was all that he could wish of religious zeal, there was devotion and faith without limit amongst the people; but there was no unity of action, no combination of purpose, amongst those who led them. Discursive and rash efforts of individuals were suffered to disturb well-laid measures and reveal long-meditated plans. Vain and frivolous controversies in newspapers, petty wars of petty localities, wasted energies, and distracted counsels. There was none of that organization, that stern discipline, which at Rome regulated every step, and ordained every movement of their mighty host. "This," muttered he to himself, "is an army without field-officers. Their guerilla notions must be henceforth exchanged for habits of military obedience. Little think they that their future general is now the solitary pedestrian of a lonely road at midnight." The recurrence to himself and his own fortunes was one of those spells which seemed to possess an almost magical influence over him. From long dwelling on the theme, he had grown to believe that he was destined by Heaven for the advancement, if not the actual triumph, of the great cause of the Church; and that he, whose origin was obscure and ignoble, could now sit down at the council of the princes of the Faith, and be heard, as one whose words were commands, was always sufficient evidence that he was reserved by fate for high achievements. Under the spell of this conviction he soon rallied from his late dejection, and his uplifted head and proud gait now showed the ambitious workings of his heart. "Ay," cried he aloud, "the first prince of the Church who for above a century has dared them to defiance! *That* is a proud thought, and well may nerve the spirit that conceives it to courageous action."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MANOR HOUSE OF CORRIG-O'NEAL.

While we leave, for a brief space, the Abbé D'Esmonde to pursue his road, we turn once more to the peaceful scene wherein we found him. Mayhap there be in this dalliance something of that fond regret, that sorrowful lingering with which a traveller halts to look down upon a view he may never see again! Yes, dear reader, we already feel that the hour of our separation draws nigh, when we shall no more be fellow-journeyers, and we would fain loiter on this pleasant spot, to tarry even a few moments longer in your company.

Passing downwards beneath that graceful bridge, which with a rare felicity seems to heighten, and not to impair, the effect of the scene, the river glides along between the rich wooded hills of a handsome demesne, and where, with the most consummate taste, every tint of foliage and every character of verdure has been cultivated to heighten the charm of the landscape. The spray-like larch, the wide-leaved sycamore, the solemn pine, the silver-trunked birch, all blending their various hues into one harmonious whole—the very perfection of a woodland picture. As if reluctant to leave so fair a scene, the stream winds and turns in a hundred bendings—now forming little embayments among the jutting rocks, and now, listlessly loitering, it dallies with the gnarled trunks of some giant beech that bends into the flood.

Emerging from these embowering woods, the river enters a new and totally different tract of country—the hills, bare of trees, are higher, almost mountainous in character, with outlines fantastic and rugged. These, it is said, were once wooded too; they present, however, little remains of forest, save here and there a low oak scrub. The sudden change from the leafy groves, ringing with many a "wood note wild," to the dreary silence of the dark region, is complete as you approach the foot of a tall mountain, at whose base the river seems arrested, and is in reality obliged by a sudden bend to seek another channel. This is Corrig-O'Neal; and here, in a little amphitheatre, surrounded by mountains of lesser size, stood the ancient manor of which mention has been more than once made in these pages.

It is but a short time back and there stood there an ancient house, whose character, half quaint, half noble, might have made it seem a French château; the tall, high-pitched roof, pierced with many a window; the richly ornamented chimneys, the long terrace, with its grotesque statues, and the intricate traceries of the old gate itself, all evidencing a taste not native to our land. The very stiff and formal avenue of lime-trees that led direct to the door had reference to a style of landscape-gardening more consonant with foreign notions, even without the fountains, which, with various strange groups of allegorical meaning, threw their tiny jets among the drooping flowers. At the back of the house lay a large garden, or rather what constituted both garden and orchard; for, although near the windows trim flower-beds and neatly gravelled walks were seen, with rare and blossoming plants, as you advanced, the turf usurped the place of the cultivated ground, and the apple, the pear, and the damson formed a dense, almost impenetrable shade.

Even on the brightest day in spring, when the light played and danced upon the shining river, with blossoming cherry-trees, and yellow crocuses in the grass, and fair soft daffodils along the water's edge, smiling like timid beauties, when the gay May-fly skimmed the rippling stream, and the strong trout splashed up to seize him—even then, with life, and light, and motion all around, there was an air of sadness on this spot—a dreary gloom, that fell upon the spirits less like sudden grief than as the memory of some old and almost forgotten sorrow. The frowning aspect of that stern mountain, which gave its name to the place, and which, in its rugged front, showed little touch of time or season, seemed to impress a mournful character on the scene. However it was, few passed the spot without feeling its influence, nor is it likely that now, when scarcely a trace of its once inhabited home remains, its aspect is more cheering.

In a dark wainscoted room of this gloomy abode, and on a raw and dreary day, our old acquaintance, Lady Hester, sat, vainly endeavouring between the fire and the screen to keep herself warm, while shawls, muffs, and mantles were heaped in most picturesque confusion around her. A French novel and a Blenheim spaniel lay at her feet, a scarce-begun piece of embroidery stood at one side of her, and an untasted cup of coffee on a small table at the other. Pale, and perhaps seeming still more so from the effect of her deep mourning, she lay back in her chair, and, with half-closed lids and folded arms, appeared as if courting sleep—or at least unconsciousness.

She had lain thus for above half an hour, when a slight rustling noise—a sound so slight as to be scarcely audible—caught her attention, and, without raising her head, she asked in a faint tone,—

"Is there any one there?"

"Yes, my lady. It is Lisa," replied her maid, coming stealthily forward, till she stood close behind her chair.

"Put some of that thing—peat, turf, or whatever it is—on the fire, child. Has the post arrived?"

"No, my lady; they say that the floods have detained the mails, and that they will be fully twelve hours late."

"Of course they will," sighed she; "and if there should be anything for *me*, they will be carried away."

"I hope not, my lady."

"What's the use of your hoping about it, child? or, if you must hope, let it be for something worth while. Hope that we may get away from this miserable place, that we may once more visit a land where there are sunshine and flowers, and live where it repays one for the bore of life."

"I'm sure I do hope it with all my heart, my lady."

"Of course you do, child. Even you must feel the barbarism of this wretched country. Have those things arrived from Dublin yet?"

"Yes, my lady; but you never could wear them. The bonnet is a great unwieldy thing, nearly as big and quite as heavy as a Life-Guardsman's helmet, and the mantle is precisely like a hearth-rug with sleeves to it. They are specially commended to your ladyship's notice, as being all of Irish manufacture."

"What need to say so?" sighed Lady Hester. "Does not every lock on every door, every scissors that will not cut, every tongs that will not hold, every parasol that turns upside down, every carriage that jolts, and every shoe that pinches you, proclaim its nationality?"

"Dr. Grounsell says, my lady, that all the fault lies in the wealthier classes, who prefer everything to native industry."

"Dr. Grounsell's a fool, Lisa. Nothing shall ever persuade me that Valenciennes and Brussels are not preferable to that ornament for fireplaces and fauteuils called Limerick lace, and Genoa velvet a more becoming wear than the O'Connell frieze. But have done with this discussion; you have already put me out of temper by the mention of that odious man's name."

"I at least saved your ladyship from seeing him this morning."

"How so? Has he been here?"

"Twice already, my lady; and threatens another visit. He says that he has something very important to communicate, and his pockets were stuffed with papers."

"Oh dear me! how I dread him and his parchments!

Those terrible details, by which people discover how little is bequeathed to them, and how securely it is tied up against every possibility of enjoying it. I'd rather be a negro slave on a coffee plantation than a widow with what is called a 'high-principled trustee' over my fortune."

"There he comes again, my lady; see how fast he is galloping up the avenue."

"Why will that pony never stumble? Amiable and worthy folk break their necks every day of the week—fathers of families and unbeneficed clergymen. Assurance companies should certainly deal lightly with crusty old bachelors and disagreeable people, for they bear charmed lives."

"Am I to admit him, my lady?" asked the maid, moving towards the door.

"Yes—no—I really cannot—but perhaps I must. It is only putting off the evil day. Yes, Lisa, let him come in, but mind that you tell him I am very poorly—that I have had a wretched night, and am quite unfit for any unpleasant news, or indeed for anything like what he calls business. Oh dear! oh dear! the very thought of parchment will make me hate sheep to the last hour of my life, and I have come to detest the very sight of my own name, from signing 'Hester Onslow' so often."

It must be said, there was at least no hypocrisy in her ladyship's lamentations; if the cause of them was not all-sufficient, the effects were to the full what she averred, and she was, or believed herself to be, the most miserable of women. Sir Stafford's will had bequeathed to her his Irish property, on the condition of her residing upon it at least six months every two years, a clause whose cruelty she—with or without reason we know not—attributed to the suggestion of Doctor Grounsell. To secure eighteen months of unlimited liberty, she was undergoing her captivity in what, it must be acknowledged, was a spirit the reverse of that the testator intended. So far from taking any interest in the country, its people, or its prospects, she only saw in it a dreary imprisonment, saddened by bad weather, bad spirits, and solitude. Nor were her griefs all causeless. Her position was greatly fallen from the possession of a fortune almost without bounds to the changeful vicissitudes of an Irish property. Norwood's dreadful death, wrapped in all the mystery which involved it, shocked her deeply, although, in reality, the event relieved her from a bondage she had long felt to be insupportable; and lastly, the Romanism, in which she had, so to say, invested all her "loose capital" of zeal and enthusiasm, had become a terrible disappointment. The gorgeous splendour of Italian Popery found a miserable representative in Irish Catholicism. The meanly-built Irish chapel, with its humble congregation, was a sorry exchange for the architectural grandeur and costly assemblage gathered within the Duomo of Florence, or beneath the fretted roof of "St. John of Lateran."

In all the sublimity of pealing music, of full-toned choirs, of incense floating up into realms of dim distance, there were but the nasal sing-song of a parish priest, and the discordant twang of a dirty acolyte! And what an interval separated the vulgar manners of the village curate from the polished addresses of the Roman cardinal! How unlike the blended pretension and cringing slavery of the one was to the high-bred bearing and courtly urbanity of the other. A visit from "Father John" was an actual infliction. To receive his Eminence was not only an honour but a sincere pleasure. Who, like him, to discuss every topic of the world and its fashionable inhabitants, touching every incident with a suave mellowness of remark that, like the light through a stained-glass window, warmed, while it softened, that which it fell upon? Who could throw over the frailties of fashion such a graceful cloak of meek forgiveness, that it seemed actually worth while to sin to be pardoned with such affection? All the pomp and circumstance of Romanism, as seen in its own capital, associated with rank, splendour, high dignity, and names illustrious in story, form a strong contrast to its vulgar pretensions in Ireland. It is so essentially allied to ceremonial and display, that when these degenerate into poverty and meanness, the effect produced is always bordering on the ludicrous. Such, at least, became the feeling of Lady Hester as she witnessed those travesties of grandeur, the originals of which had left her awe-stricken and amazed.

Shorn of fortune, deprived of all the illusions which her newly adopted creed had thrown around her, uncheered by that crowd of flatterers which used to form her circle, is it any wonder if her spirits and her temper gave way, and that she fancied herself the very type of misery and desertion? The last solace of such minds is in the pity they bestow upon themselves; and here she certainly excelled, and upon no occasion more forcibly than when receiving a visit from Doctor Grounsell.

"Doctor Grounsell, my lady," said a servant; and, at the words, that gentleman entered.

A heavy greatcoat, with numerous capes, a low-crowned glazed hat, and a pair of old-fashioned "Hessians," into which his trousers were tucked, showed that he had not stooped to any artifices of toilet to win favour with her ladyship. As she bowed slightly to him, she lifted her glass to her eye, and then dropped it suddenly with a gentle simper, as though to say that another glance would have perilled her gravity.

"Winter has set in early, madam," said he, approaching the fire, "and with unusual severity. The poor are great sufferers this year."

"I'm sure I agree with you," sighed Lady Hester. "I never endured such cold before!"

"I spoke of the 'poor,' madam," retorted he, abruptly.

"Woll, sir, has any one a better right to respond in their name than I have? Look around you, see where I am living, and how, and then answer me!"

"Madam," said Grounsell, sternly, and fixing his eyes steadily on her as he spoke, "I have ridden for two hours of this morning over part of that tract which is your estate. I have visited more than a dozen—I will not call them houses, but hovels. There was fever in some, ague in others, and want, utter want, in all; and yet I never heard one of the sufferers select himself as the special mark of misfortune, but rather allude to his misery as part of that common calamity to which flesh is heir. 'God help the poor!' was the prayer, and they would have felt ashamed to have invoked the blessing on themselves alone."

"I must say, that if you have been to see people with typhus, and perhaps small-pox, it shows very little consideration to come and visit *me* immediately after, sir."

Grounsell's face grew purple, but with a great effort he repressed the reply that was on his lips, and was silent.

"Of course, then, these poor creatures can pay nothing, sir?"

"Nothing, madam."

"Che bella cosa! an Irish property!" cried she, with a scornful laugh; "and, if I mistake not, sir, it was to your kind intervention and influence that I am indebted for this singular mark of my husband's affection?"

"Quite true, madam. I had supposed it to be possible—just possible—that, by connecting your personal interest with duties, you might be reclaimed from a life of frivolity and idleness to an existence of active and happy utility, and this without any flattering estimate of your qualities, madam."

"Oh, sir, this is a very needless protest," said she, bowing and smiling.

"I repeat, madam, that, without any flattering estimate of your qualities, I saw quite enough to convince me that kindness and benevolence were just as easy to you as their opposites."

"Why, you have become a courtier, sir," said she, with a smile of sly malice.

"I'm sorry for it, madam; I'd as soon be mistaken for a hairdresser or a dancing-master. But to return. Whether I was correct or not in my theory would appear to be of little moment; another, and more pressing view of the case, usurping all our interests, which is no less, madam, than your actual right and title to this estate at all."

Lady Hester leaned forward in her chair as he said this, and in a low but unshaken voice, replied, "Do I understand you aright, sir, that the title to this property is contested?"

"Not yet, madam; there is no claim set up as yet; but there is every likelihood that there will be such. Rumours have gradually grown into open discussions—threatening notices have been sent to me by post, and stories which at first I had deemed vague and valueless have assumed a degree of importance from the details by which they were accompanied. In fact, madam, without any clue to the nature or direct drift of the plot, I can yet see that a formidable scheme is being contrived, the great agent of which is to be menace."

"Oh dear, what a relief it would be to me were I quite certain of all this!" exclaimed Lady Hester, with a deep sigh.

"What a relief? did you say, what a relief, madam?" cried Grounsell, in amazement.

"Yes, sir, that was precisely the word I used."

"Then I must have blundered most confoundedly, madam, in my effort to explain myself. I was endeavouring to show you that your claim to the estate might be disputed!"

"Very well, sir, I perfectly understood you."

"You did, eh? You perceive that you might possibly lose the property, and you acquiesce calmly——"

"Nay, more, sir, I rejoice sincerely at the very thought of it."

"Well, then, upon my——eh? May the devil—I beg pardon, madam, but this is really such a riddle to me that I must confess my inability to unravel it."

"Shall I aid you, sir?" said Lady Hester, with an easy smile on her features. "When bequeathing this estate to me, Sir Stafford expressly provided, that if, from any political convulsion, Ireland should be separated from her union with Great Britain, or if by course of law a substantial claim was established to the property by another, that I should be recompensed for the loss by an income of equal amount derived from the estate of his son, George Onslow, at whose discretion it lay to allocate any portion of his inheritance he deemed suitable for the purpose."

"All true, madam—quite true," broke in Grounsell; "and the Solicitor-General's opinion is, that the provision is perfectly nugatory—not worth sixpence. It has not one single tie of obligation, and, from its vagueness, is totally inoperative."

"In law, sir, it may be all that you say," replied Lady Hester, calmly; "but I have yet to learn that this is the appeal to which Captain Onslow would submit it."

Grounsell stared at her; and, for the first time in all his life he thought her handsome. That his own features revealed the admiration he felt was also plain enough, and Lady Hester was very far from being insensible to the tribute.

"So that, madam," cried he, at length, "you prefer insecurity to certainty."

"Say rather, sir, that I have more confidence in the honourable sentiments of an English gentleman than I have in the solvency of a poor and wretched peasantry. Up to this very hour I have known nothing except the claims upon myself. I don't like the climate; and I am certain the neighbours do not like *me*—in fact, I have neither the youth nor the enterprise suited to a new country."

"Why, good heavens! madam, it isn't New Zealand we're in!" cried Grounsell, angrily.

"Perhaps not," sighed she, languidly; "but it is just as strange to *me*."

"I see, madam," said Grounsell, rising, "my plan was a bad one: a wing in the Borghese Palace—a spacious apartment of the Corsini, on the Arno—or even the first-floor of the Moncenigo, at Venice, would have been a happier choice than a gloomy old mansion on the banks of an Irish river."

"Oh! do not speak of it, sir," cried she, enthusiastically. "Do not remind me of starry skies, and the deep blue Adriatic, in this land of cloud and fog, where even the rain is 'dirty water.' Pray make the very weakest defence of my claim to his inheritance. I only ask to march out with my baggage, and do not even stipulate for the honours of war. Let me have George's address."

"You'll not need it, madam; he will be here within a few days. He has been promoted to a majority for his conduct in the field, and returns to England covered with praise and honours."

"What delightful news, Dr. Grounsell; you are actually charming this morning!" The doctor bowed stiffly at the compliment, and she went on: "I often thought that you could be amiable, if you would only let yourself; but, like the Cardinal Gualterino, you took up the character of Bear, and 'Bear' you would be at all times and seasons; and then those horrid coats, that you would persist in wearing—how you ever got them of that odious brown, I can't think—they must have dyed the wool to order—not but that I think your shoes were worst of all."

Grounsell understood too well the wordy absurdity with which her ladyship, on the least excitement, was accustomed to launch forth, quite forgetful of all the impertinence into which it betrayed her. He, therefore, neither interposed a remark, nor seemed in any way conscious of her observation, but coldly waiting till she had concluded, he said,—

"Some other of your ladyship's friends are also expected in this neighbourhood—the Daltons!"

"What—my dear Kate?"

"Yes; Miss Kate Dalton, accompanied by her brother and uncle. I have just been to order apartments for them in the hotel at Kilkenny."

"But they must come here. I shall insist upon it, doctor. This is a point on which I will accept no refusal."

"The occasion which calls them to Ireland, madam, and of which you shall hear all, hereafter, would totally preclude such an arrangement."

"More mystery, sir?" exclaimed she.

"Another side of the same one, madam," rejoined he, dryly.

"What delightful news, to think I shall see my dearest Kate again! I am dying to know all about Russia, and if the ladies do wear pearls in morning toilette, and whether turquoises are only seen in fans and parasol handles. What splendour she must have seen!"

"Humph!" said Grounsell, with a short shrug of the shoulders.

"Oh! I know you despise all these things, and you hate caviare. Then I want to know about the prince; why the match was broken off; and from what cause she refused that great settlement—some thousand roubles. much is a rouble, by the way, doctor?"

"I really cannot tell you, madam," said he, bluntly, who saw that she was once more "wide a-field."

"She'll tell me all herself, and everything about Russia. I want to hear about the knout, and the malachite, and that queer habif gambling before dinner is announced. I'm sure I should like St. Petersburg. And the brother, what is he like?"

"I only know, madam, that he is a great invalid, not yet recovered from his wounds!"

"How interesting! He was in the patriot army, was he not?"

"He fought for the Emperor, madam; pray make no mistake in that sense."

"Oh dear! how difficult it is to remember all these things; and yet I knew it perfectly when I was at Florence!—all about the Kaiser-Jägers, and the Crociati, and the Croats, and the rest of them. It was the Crociati, or the Croats—I forget which—eat little children. It's perfectly true; Guardarelli, when he was a prisoner, saw an infant roasting for Radetzky's own table!"

"I would beg of you, madam, not to mention this fact to the field-marshal, Miss Kate Dalton's uncle."

"Oh! of course not; and I trust he will not expect that we could provide him with such delicacies here. Now, doctor, how shall we amuse these people? what can we do?"

"Remember, first of all, madam, that their visit to Ireland is not an excursion of pleasure——"

"Oh, I can perfectly conceive *that!*" interrupted she, with a look of irony.

"I was about to remark, that an affair of deep importance was the cause of their journey——"

"More business!" broke she in again. "After all, then, I suppose I am not much more miserable than the rest of the world. Everybody would seem to have what you call 'affairs of importance.'"

"Upon my word, madam, you have made me totally forget *mine*, then," said Grounsell, jumping up from his seat, and looking at his watch. "I came here prepared to make certain explanations, and ask your opinion on certain points. It is now two o'clock, and I have not even opened the matter in hand."

Lady Hester laughed heartily at his distress, and continued to enjoy her mirth as he packed up his scattered papers, buttoned his greatcoat, and hurried away, without even the ceremony of a leave-taking.

* * *

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"THE RORE."

D'Esmonde and his friend Michel sat beside the fire in a small parlour of the wayside public-house called "The Rore." They were both thoughtful and silent, and in their moody looks might be read the signs of brooding care. As for the abbé, anxiety seemed to have worn him like sickness; for his jaws were sunk and hollow, while around his eyes deep circles of a dusky purple were strongly marked.

It was not without reason that they were thus moved; since Meekins, who hitherto rarely or never ventured abroad, had, on that morning, gone to the fair of Graigue, a village some few miles away, where he was recognized by a farmer—an old man named Lenahan—as the steward of the late Mr. Godfrey. It was to no purpose that he assumed all the airs of a stranger to the country, and asked various questions about the gentry and the people. The old farmer watched him long and closely, and went home fully satisfied that he had seen Black Sam—the popular name by which he was known on the estate. In his capacity of bailiff, Black Sam had been most unpopular in the country. Many hardships were traced to his counsels; and it was currently believed that Mr. Godfrey would never have proceeded harshly against a tenant except under his advice. This character, together with his mysterious disappearance after the murder, were quite sufficient, in peasant estimation, to connect him with the crime; and no sooner had Lenahan communicated his discovery to his friends, than they, one and all, counselled him to go up to the doctor—as Grounsell was called on the property—and ask his advice.

The moment Grounsell heard that the suspected man called himself Meekins, he issued a warrant for his arrest;

and so promptly was it executed, that he was taken on that very evening, as he was returning to "The Rore." The tidings only reached the little inn after nightfall, and it was in gloomy confabulation over them that the two priests were now seated. The countryman who had brought the news was present when the police arrested Sam, and was twice called back into the parlour, as D'Esmonde questioned him on the circumstance.

It was after a long interval of silence that the abbé, for the third time, summoned the peasant before him.

"You have not told me under what name they arrested him. Was it Meekins?"

"The sergeant said, 'You call yourself Meekins, my good man?' and the other said, 'Why not?' 'Oh, no reason in life,' says the sergeant; 'but you must come with us—that's all.' 'Have you a warrant for what you're doing?' says he. 'Ay,' says the polis; 'you broke yer bail——'"

"Yes, yes," broke in D'Esmonde, "you mentioned all that already. And Meekins showed no fear on being taken?"

"No more than your reverence does this minute. Indeed, I never see a man take it so easy. 'Mind what you're doing,' says he; 'for, though I'm a poor man, I have strong friends, that won't see me wronged.' And then he said something about one 'Father Matthew,' but whether it was you, or that other clergyman there, I don't know."

"They took him to Thomastown?"

"No, your reverence—to Kilkenny."

"That will do, my good man," said D'Esmonde, with a nod of his head; and then, as the door closed behind him, added, "You see, Michel, I was right in my fears of this doctor. The evasive terms of his note, too, confirmed my suspicions—that 'desire for further time in a matter of such great difficulty.' We have thrown him on the scent, and he is now in full cry after the game. Shame upon us!—shame! that such as he can foil us at our own weapons. I see his plan clearly enough. He is either in possession of some secret fact of this man's early life, which can be employed as a menace to extort a confession from him, or he is about to work on him by bribery. Now, as to the former, I am perfectly at ease. What I, with every agency of the Church, have failed to elicit, I can safely defy the layman's craft to detect. As to the effect of a bribe, I am far from being so certain."

"And in either case the result concerns you but little," said Cahill. "The fellow has nothing in his power against *you*."

"Nothing," said D'Esmonde. "I never left myself in the hands of such as he! It will, of course, be disagreeable to me that our intercourse should be made public. The Orange press will know how to connect our intimacy with a thousand schemes and subtleties that I never dreamed of; and, more offensive still, the assumedre lationship to Mr. Godfrey will afford a fruitful theme for sneer and sarcasm! I foresee it all, my good Michel, and, worst of all, I perceive how this publicity will mar higher and nobler objects. The Sacred College will never make a prince of the Church of one whose name has been sullied by the slang of journalism! These are the dangers to be averted here. You must contrive to see this man at once—to assure him of our interest and protection, if he be but discreet and careful. He may safely deny all knowledge of the circumstances to which we alluded. We are the only persons to whom he made these revelations. He has only to assume an ignorance of everything. Impress this upon him, Michel; for if they can involve him in a narrative, be it ever so slight or vague, these lawyers exercise a kind of magic power, in what is called cross-examination, and can detect a secret fact by tests as fine as those by which the chemist discovers a grain of poison. Would that I could see him myself! but this might be imprudent."

"Trust all to me, D'Esmonde; and believe me, that, with men like him, habit has taught me better how to deal than you, with all your higher skill, could accomplish. I will contrive to see him to-night, or early to-morrow. The under-turnkey was from my own parish, and I can make my visit as if to *him*."

"How humiliating is it," cried D'Esmonde, rising and pacing the room—"how humiliating to think that incidents like these are to sway and influence us in our road through life; but so it is, the great faults that men commi are less dangerous than are imprudent intimacies and ill judged associations. It is not on the high bluff or the bold headland that the craft is shipwrecked, but on some small sunken rock—some miserable reef beneath the waves! Could we but be 'penny wise' in morals, Michel, how rich we should be in knowledge of life! I never needed this fellow—never wanted his aid in any way! The unhappy mention of Godfrey's name—the spell that in some shape or other has worked on my heart through life—first gave him an interest in my eyes, and so, bit by bit, I have come to be associated with him, till—would you believe it?—I cannot separate myself from him. Has it ever occurred to you, Michel, that the Evil One sometimes works his ends by infusing into the nature of some chance intimate that species of temptation by which courageous men are so easily seduced—I mean that love of hazard—that playing with fire, so intoxicating in its excitement? I am convinced that to *me* no bait could be so irresistible. Tell me that the earth is mined, and you invest it with a charm that all the verdure of 'Araby the Blest' could never give it! I love to handle steel when the lightning is playing; not, mark me, from any contempt of life, far less in any spirit of blasphemous defiance, but simply for the glorious sentiment of peril. Be assured, that when all other excitements pall upon the mind, this one survives in all its plenitude, and, as the poet says of avarice, becomes a good 'old gentlemanly vice.'"

"You will come along with me, D'Esmonde?" said the other, whose thoughts were concentrated on the business before him.

"Yes, Michel, I am as yet unknown here; and it may be, too, that this Meekins might wish to see me. We must take good care, while we avoid any public notice, that this fellow should not think himself deserted by us."

"The very point on which I was reflecting, D'Esmonde. We can talk over this as we go along."

As the two priests affected to be engaged on a kind of mission to collect subscriptions for some sacred purpose, their appearance or departure excited no feeling of astonishment, and the landlord of "The Rore" saw them prepare to set out without expressing the least surprise.

The little "low-backed car," the common conveyance of the people at fair and market, was soon at the door; and, seated in this, and well protected against the weather by rugs and blankets, they began their journey.

"This is but a sorry substitute for the scarlet-panelled coach of the cardinal, D'Esmonde," said his companion, smiling.

A low, faint sigh was all the answer the other made, and so they went their way in silence.

The day broke drearily and sad-looking; a thin, cold rain was falling, and, from the leaden sky above to the damp earth beneath, all was gloomy and depressing. The peasantry they passed on the road were poor-looking and meanly clad; the houses on the wayside were all miserable to a degree; and while his companion slept, D'Esmonde was deep in his contemplation of these signs of poverty. "No," said he, at last, as if summing up the passing reflections in his own mind, "this country is not ripe for the great changes we are preparing. The gorgeous splendour of the Church would but mock this misery. The rich robe of the cardinal would be but an insult to the ragged coat of the peasant! England must be our field. Ireland must be content with a missionary priesthood! Italy, indeed, has poverty, but there is an intoxication in the life of that land which defies it. The sun, the sky, the blue water, the vineyards, the groves of olive, and the fig—the light-headedness that comes of an existence where no fears invade—no gloomy to-morrow has ever threatened. These are the elements to baffle all the cares of narrow fortune, and hence the gifts which make men true believers! In climates such as this men brood, and think, and ponder. Uncheered from without, they turn within, and then come doubts and hesitations—the fatal craving to know that which they may not! Of a truth these regions of the north are but ill suited to our glorious faith, and Protestantism must shun the sun, as she does the light of reason itself."

"What! are you preaching, D'Esmonde?" cried his friend, waking up at the energetic tone of the abbé's voice. "Do you fancy yourself in the pulpit? But here we are, close to the town. We had better dismount now, and proceed on foot."

Having dismissed their humble equipage, the two friends walked briskly along, and entered the city, which, even at this early hour, was filling for its weekly market.

D'Esmonde took up his quarters at once at a small inn close by the castle gate, and the priest Cahill immediately proceeded to the gaol. He found no difficulty in obtaining access to his acquaintance the under-turnkey, but, to his disappointment, all approach to Meekins was strictly interdicted. "The magistrates were here," said the turnkey, "till past midnight with him, and that English agent of the Corrig-O'Neal estate was along with them. What took place, I cannot even guess, for it was done in secret. I only overheard one of the gentlemen remark, as he passed out, 'That fellow is too deep for us all; we'll make nothing of him.'"

Cahill questioned the man closely as to what the arrest related, and whether he had heard of any allegation against Meekins; but he knew nothing whatever, save that he had broken his bail some years before. The strictest watch was enjoined over the prisoner, and all intercourse from without rigidly denied. To the priest's inquiries about Meekins himself, the turnkey replied by saying that he had never seen any man with fewer signs of fear or trepidation. "Whatever they have against him," added he, "he's either innocent, or he defies them to prove him guilty."

Cahill's entreaties were all insufficient to make the turnkey disobey his orders. Indeed, he showed that the matter was one of as much difficulty as danger, the chief gaoler being specially interested in the case by some observation of one of the justices.

"You can at least carry a message for me?" said the priest, at last.

"It's just as much as I dare do," replied the other.

"You incur no risk whatever, so far," continued Cahill. "The poor man is my sacristan, and I am deeply interested for him. I only heard of his being arrested last night, and you see I've lost no time in coming to see after him. Tell him this. Tell him that I was here at daybreak, and that I'll do my best to get leave to speak with him during the day. Tell him, moreover, that, if I shouldn't succeed in this, not to be down-hearted, for that we—a friend of mine and myself—will not desert him nor see him wronged. And, above all, tell him to say nothing whatever to the magistrates. Mind me well—not a syllable of any kind."

"I mistake him greatly," said the turnkey, "or he's the man to take a hint quick enough, particularly if it's for his own benefit."

"And so it is—his own, and no other's," rejoined the priest. "If he but follow this advice, I'll answer for his being liberated before the week ends. Say, also, that I'd send him some money, but that it might draw suspicion on him; and for the present it is better to be cautious."

Before Cahill left the prison, he reiterated all his injunctions as to caution, and the turnkey faithfully pledged himself to enforce them on the prisoner.

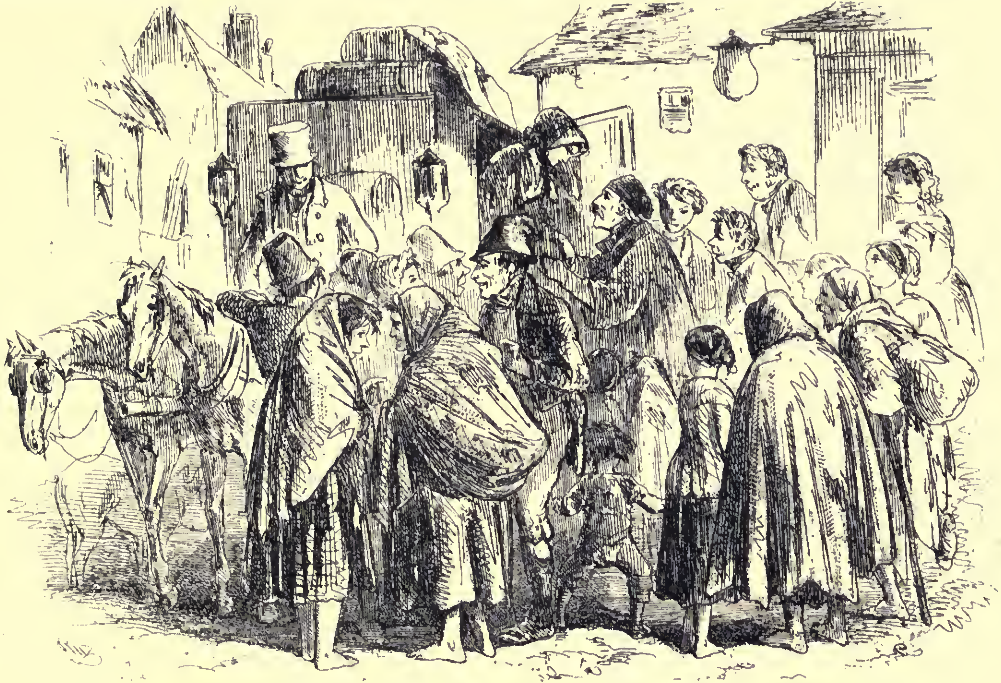
"I will come again this evening," said the priest, "and you can tell me what he says; for, as he has no friend but myself, I must not forsake him."

As Cahill gained the street, a heavy travelling-carriage, whose lumbering build bespoke a foreign origin, passed by with four posters, and, sweeping across the market-place, drew up at the chief inn of the town. The priest, in idle curiosity, mingled with the lounging crowd that immediately gathered around the strange-looking equipage, where appliances for strength and comfort seemed blended, in total disregard to all facilities for motion. A bustling courier, with all the officiousness of his craft, speedily opened the door and banged down the steps, and a very tall old man, in what appeared to be an undress military frock, descended, and then assisted a young lady to alight. This done, they both gave their arm to a young man, whose wasted form and uncertain step bespoke long and severe illness. Supporting him at either side, they assisted him up the steps into the hall, while the bystanders amused themselves in criticizing the foreigners, for such their look and dress declared them.

"The ould fellow with a white beard over his lip is a Roosian or a Proosian," cried one, who aspired to no small skill in continental nationalities.

"Faix! the daughter takes the shine out of them all," cried another. "She's a fine crayture!"

"The brother was a handsome man before he had that



The return to the "Ould Country.

sickness," observed a third. "'Tis no use of his legs he has!"

These frank commentaries on the new arrivals were suddenly interrupted by the appearance of the old man on the steps of the hall door, where he stood gazing down the street, and totally unconscious of the notice he was attracting.

"What's that building yonder?" cried he, to the waiter at his side, and his accent, as he spoke, betrayed a foreign tongue. "The Town Hall!—ah, to be sure, I remember it now; and, if I be not much mistaken, there is—at least there was—an old rickety stair to a great loft overhead, where a strange fellow lived, who made masks for the theatre—what's this his name was?" The bystanders listened to these reminiscences in silent astonishment, but unable to supply the missing clue to memory. "Are none of you old enough to remember Jack Ruth, the huntsman?" cried he, aloud.

"I have heard my father talk of him," said a middle-aged man, "if it was the same that galloped down the mountain of Corrig-O'Neal and swam the river at the foot of it."

"The very man," broke in the stranger. "Two of the dogs, but not a man, dared to follow! I have seen some bold feats since that day, but I scarcely think I have ever witnessed a more dashing exploit. If old Jack has left any of his name and race behind him," said he, turning to the waiter, "say that there's one here would like to see him;" and with this he re-entered the inn.

"Who is this gentleman that knows the country so well?" asked the priest.

"Count Dalton von Auersberg, sir," replied the courier. "His whole thoughts are about Ireland now, though I believe he has not been here for upwards of sixty years."

"Dalton!" muttered the priest to himself; "what can have brought them to Ireland? D'Esmonde must be told of this at once!" And he pushed through the crowd and hastened back to the little inn.

The abbé was engaged in writing as Cahill entered the room.

"Have you seen him, Michel?" cried he, eagerly, as he raised his head from the table.

"No. Admission is strictly denied——"

"I thought it would be so—I suspected what the game would be. This Grounsell means to turn the tables, and practise upon *us* the menace that was meant for *him*. I foresee all that he intends, but I'll foil him! I have written here to Wallace, the Queen's Counsel, to come down here at once. This charge against old Dalton, in hands like his, may become a most formidable accusation."

"I have not told you that these Daltons have arrived here——"

"What! Of whom do you speak?"

"The old Count von Dalton, with a niece and nephew."

D'Esmonde sprang from his seat, and for some seconds stood still and silent.

"This is certain, Michel? You know this to be true?"

"I saw the old general myself, and heard him talk with the waiter."

"The combat will, then, be a close one," muttered D'Esmonde. "Grounsell has done this, and it shall cost them dearly. Mark me, Michel—all that the rack and the thumb-screw were to our ancestors, the system of a modern trial realizes in our day. There never was a torture, the invention of man's cruelty, as terrible as cross-examination! I care not that this Dalton should have been as innocent as you are of this crime—it matters little if his guiltlessness appear from the very outset. Give me but two days of searching inquiry into his life, his habits, and his ways. Let me follow him to his fireside, in his poverty, and lay bare all the little straits and contrivances by which he eked out existence, and maintained a fair exterior. Let me show them to the world, as I can show them, with penury within, and pretension without. These disclosures cannot be suppressed as irrelevant—they are the alleged motives of the crime. The family that sacrifices a child to a hateful alliance—that sells to Austrian bondage the blood of an only son—and consigns to menial labour a maimed and sickly girl, might well have gone a step further in crime."

"D'Esmonde! D'Esmonde!" cried the other, as he pressed him down into a seat, and took his hand between his own, "these are not words of calm reason, but the outpourings of passion." The abbé made no answer, but his chest heaved and fell, and his breath came with a rushing sound, while his eyes glared like the orbs of a wild animal.

"You are right, Michel," said he, at last, with a faint sigh. "This was a paroxysm of that hate which, stronger than all my reason, has actuated me through life. Again and again have I told you, that towards these Daltons I bear a kind of instinctive aversion. These antipathies are not to be combated—there are brave men who will shudder if they see a spider. I have seen a courageous spirit quail before a worm. These are not caprices, to be laughed at—they are indications full of pregnant meaning, could we but read them aright. How my temples throb!—my head seems splitting. Now leave me, Michel, for a while, and I will try to take some rest."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A TALK OVER "BYGONES."

It was with a burst of joy that Lady Hester heard the Daltons had arrived. In the wearisome monotony of her daily life, anything to do, anywhere to go, any one to see, would have been esteemed boons of great price; what delight, then, was it to meet those with whom she could converse of "bygone times" and other lands!—"that dear Kate," whom she really liked as well as it was in her nature to love anything, from whom she now anticipated so much of that gossip, technically called "news," and into whose confiding heart she longed to pour out her own private woes!

The meeting was indeed affectionate on both sides; and, as Lady Hester was in her most gracious of moods, Frank thought her the very type of amiability, and the old count pronounced her manners fit for the high ordeal of Vienna itself. Perhaps our reader will be grateful if we leave to his imagination all the changeful moods of grief and joy, surprise, regret, and ecstasy, with which her ladyship questioned and listened to Kate Dalton's stories; throwing out, from time to time, little reflections of her own, as though incidentally, to show how much wiser years had made her. There are people who ever regard the misfortunes of others as mere key-notes to elicit their own sufferings; and thus, when Kate spoke of Russia, Lady Hester quoted Ireland. Frank's sufferings reminded her of her own "nerves;" and poor Nelly's unknown fate was precisely "the condition of obscurity to which Sir Stafford's cruel will had consigned herself."

Kate's mind was very far from being at ease, and yet it was with no mean pleasure she found herself seated beside Lady Hester, talking over the past with all that varying emotion which themes of pleasure and sadness call up. Who has not enjoyed the delight of such moments, when, living again bygone days, we laugh or sigh over incidents wherein once as actors we had moved and felt? If time has dimmed our perceptions of pleasure, it has also softened down resentments and allayed asperities. We can afford to forgive so much, and we feel, also, so confident of others' forgiveness, and if regrets do steal over us that these things have passed away for ever, there yet lurks the flattering thought that we have grown wiser than we then were. So is it the autobiographies of the fireside are pleasant histories, whose vanities are all pardonable, and whose trifling is never ungraceful! Memory throws such a softened light on the picture, that even bores become sufferable, and we extract a passing laugh from the most tiresome of our quondam "afflictives."

Had her ladyship been less occupied with herself and her own emotions, she could not have failed to notice the agitation under which Kate suffered at many of her chance remarks. The levity, too, with which she discussed her betrothal to Midchekoff almost offended her. The truth was, Kate had half forgotten the reckless, unthinking style of her friend's conversation, and it required a little practice and training to grow accustomed to it again.

"Yes, my dear," she went on, "I have had such trouble to persuade people that it was no marriage at all, but a kind of engagement; and when that horrid Emperor wouldn't give his consent, of course there was an end of it. You may be sure, my sweet child, I never believed one syllable of that vile creature's story about George's picture; but somehow it has got abroad, and that odious Heidendorf goes about repeating it everywhere. I knew well that you never cared for poor dear George! Indeed, I told him as much when he was quite full of admiration for you. It is so stupid in men! their vanity makes them always believe that, if they persist—just persevere—in their attachment, the woman will at last succumb. Now, *we* have a better sense of these things, and actually adore the man that shows indifference to us—at least, I am sure that I do. Such letters as the poor boy keeps writing about you! And about five months ago, when he was so badly wounded, and did not expect to recover, he actually made his will, and left you all he had in the world. Oh dear!" said she, with a heavy sigh, "they have generous moments, these men, but they never last; and, by the way, I must ask your advice—though I already guess what it will be—about a certain friend of ours, who has had what I really must call the presumption—for, after all, Kate, I think you'll agree with me it is a very great presumption—is it not, dear?"

"Until you tell me a little more," replied Kate, with a sigh, "I can scarcely answer."

"Well, it's Mr. Jekyl—you remember, that little man that used to be so useful at Florence; not but he has very pretty manners, and a great deal of tact in society. His letters, too, are inimitably droll. I'll show you some of them."

"Oh! then you are in correspondence with him?" said Kate, slyly.

"Yes; that is, he writes to *me*—and I—I sometimes send *him* a short note. In fact, it was the Abbé D'Esmonde induced me to think of it at all; and I was bored here, and so unhappy, and so lonely."

"I perceive," said Kate; "but I trust that there is nothing positive—nothing like an engagement?"

"And why, dear?—whence these cautious scruples?" said Lady Hester, almost peevishly.

"Simply because he is very unworthy of you," said Kate, bluntly, and blushing deep at her own hardihood.

"Oh, I'm quite sure of that," said Lady Hester, casting down her eyes. "I know—I feel that I am mistaken and misunderstood. The world has always judged me unfairly! You alone, dearest, ever comprehended me; and even you could not guess of what I am capable! If you were to read my journal—if you were just to see what sufferings I have gone through! And then that terrible shock! though, I must say, D'Esmonde's mode of communicating it was delicacy itself. A very strange man that abbé is, Kate. He now and then talks in a way that makes one suspect his affections are or have been engaged."

"I always believed him too deeply immersed in other cares."

"Oh, what a short-sighted judgment, child! These are the minds that always feel most! I know this by myself—during the last two years especially! When I think what I have gone through! The fate, not alone of Italy, but of Europe, of the world, I may say, discussed and determined at our fireside! Yes, Kate, I assure you, so it was. D'Esmonde referred many points to me, saying, 'that the keener perception of a female mind must be our pilot here.' Of course, I felt all the responsibility, but never, never was I agitated. How often have I held the destiny of the Imperial House in my hands! How little do they suspect what they owe to my forbearance! But these are not themes to interest you, dearest, and, of course, your prejudices are all Austrian. I must say, Kate, 'the uncle' is charming! Just that kind of dear old creature so graceful for a young woman to lean upon; and I love his long white moustache! His French, too, is admirable—that Madame de Sévigné turn of expression, so unlike modern flippancy, and so respectful to women!"

"I hope you like Frank!" said Kate, with artless eagerness in her look.

"He's wonderfully good-looking without seeming to know it; but, of course, one cannot expect that to last, Kate."

"Oh! you cannot think how handsome he was before this illness; and then he is so gentle and affectionate."

"There—there, child, you must not make me fall in love with him, for you know all my sympathies are Italian; and, having embroidered that beautiful banner for the 'Legion of Hope'—pretty name, is it not?—I never could tolerate the 'Barbari.'"

"Pray do not call them such to my uncle," said Kate, smiling.

"Never fear, dearest. I'm in the habit of meeting all kinds of horrid people without ever offending a prejudice; and, besides, I am bent on making a conquest of 'Mon Oncle;' he is precisely the species of adorer I like best. I hope he does not take snuff."

Kate laughed, as she shook her head in sign of negative.

From this Lady Hester diverged to all manner of reflections about the future—as to whether she ought or ought not to know Midchekoff when she met him; if the villa of La Rocca were really Kate's, or hers, or the property of somebody else; who was Jekyl's father, or if he ever had such an appendage; in what part of the Tyrol Nelly was then sojourning; was it possible she was married to the dwarf, and ashamed to confess it?—and a vast variety of similar speculations, equally marked by a bold indifference as to probability, and a total disregard to the feelings of her companion. Kate was, then, far from displeased when a messenger came to say that the general was alone in the drawing-room, and would esteem it a favour if the ladies would join him.

"How do you mean, alone?" asked Lady Hester. "Where is Mr. Dalton?"

"Dr. Grounsell came for him, my lady, and took him away in a carriage."

"Poor Frank, he is quite unequal to such fatigue," exclaimed Kate.

"It is like that horrid doctor. His cruelties to me have been something incredible; at the same time, there's not a creature on my estate he does not sympathize with! You'll see how it will be, dearest; he'll take your dear brother somewhere where there's a fever, or perhaps the plague—for I believe they have it here; and in his delicate state he's sure to catch it and die! Mark my words, dearest Kate, and see if they'll not come true." And with this reassuring speech she slipped her arm within her companion's and moved out of the room.

It may be conjectured that it was not without weighty reasons Grounsell induced Frank, weary and exhausted as he was, to leave his home and accompany him on a cold and dreary night to the city gaol. Although declining to enter upon the question before a third party, no sooner were they alone together than the doctor proceeded to an explanation. Meekins, who it appeared showed the greatest indifference at first, had, as the day wore on, grown restless and impatient. This irritability was increased by the want of his accustomed stimulant of drink, in which, latterly, he had indulged freely, and it was in such a mood he asked for pen and paper, and wrote a few lines to request that young Mr. Dalton would visit him. Grounsell, who made a point to watch the prisoner from hour to hour, no sooner heard this, than he hastened off to the inn with the intelligence.

"There is not a moment to be lost," said he. "This fellow, from all that I can learn, is but the tool of others, who are bent on bringing before the world the whole story of this terrible crime. A priest, named Cahill, and who for some time back has been loitering about the neighbourhood, was at the gaol this morning before daybreak. Later on, he posted a letter for Dublin, the address of which I was enabled to see. It was to the eminent lawyer in criminal cases, Mr. Wallace.

"That some great attack is in preparation, I have, then, no doubt; the only question is, whether the object be to extort money by threats of publicity, or is there some deep feeling of revenge against your name and family?

"The gaoler, who is in my interest, gives me the most accurate detail of the prisoner's conduct, and, although I am fully prepared to expect every species of duplicity and deceit from a fellow of this stamp, yet it is not impossible that, seeing himself to a certain extent in our power, he may be disposed to desert to our ranks.

"He asks you to come alone, and of course you must comply. Whatever be the subject of his revelations, be most guarded in the way you receive them. Avow utter ignorance of everything, and give him reasons to suppose that your great object here is, to prevent the exposure and disgrace of a public trial. This may make him demand higher terms; but at the same time he will be thrown upon fuller explanations to warrant them. In fact, you must temper your manner between a conscious power over the fellow, and an amicable desire to treat with him.

"He has heard, within the last half-hour, that he has been recognized here by a former acquaintance, whose account of him includes many circumstances of deep suspicion. It may have been this fact has induced him to write to you. This you will easily discover in his manner. But here we are at the gates, and once more, I say, be cautious and guarded in everything.

"Well, Mr. Gray," said Grounsell to the gaoler, "you see we have not delayed very long. Ill as he is, Mr. Dalton has accepted this invitation."

"And he has done well, sir," replied the gaoler. "The man's bearing is greatly changed since morning: some panic has evidently seized him. There's no saying how long this temper may last; but you are quite right to profit by it while there is yet time."

"Is he low and depressed, then?"

"Terribly so, sir. He asked a while ago if any one had called to see him. Of course we guessed whom he meant, and said that a priest had been at the gaol that morning, but only to learn the charge under which he was apprehended. He was much mortified on being told that the priest neither expressed a wish to see nor speak with him."

Grounsell gave a significant glance towards Frank, who now followed the gaoler to the prisoner's cell.

"He's crying, sir; don't you hear him?" whispered the gaoler to Frank, as they stood outside the door. "You couldn't have a more favourable moment." And, thus saying, he rattled the heavy bunch of keys, in order to give the prisoner token of his approach; and then, throwing open the door, called out, "Here's the gentleman you asked for, Meekins; see that you don't keep him long in this cold place, for he is not very well."

Frank had but time to reach the little settle on which he sat down, when the door was closed, and he was alone with the prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE GAOL.

Frank Dalton was in no wise prepared for the quiet and easy self-possession with which Meekins, after asking pardon for the liberty of his note, took a seat in front of him. Smoothing down his short and glossy black hair with his hand, he seemed to wait for Frank to open the conversation; and, while there was nothing of insolence in his manner, there was an assured calmness, far more distressing to a young and nervous invalid.

"You wished to see me, Meekins," said Frank, at last; "what can I do for you?"

The man bent slightly forward on his chair, and fixing his keen and penetrating eyes, continued steadily to stare at him for several seconds.

"You're too young and too generous to have a double in you," said he, after a long pause, in which it seemed as if he were scanning the other's nature; "and before we say any more, just tell me one thing. Did any one advise you to come here to-night?"

"Yes," said Frank, boldly.

"It was that doctor—the man they call the agent—wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied the youth, in the same tone.

"Now, what has he against *me?*—what charge does he lay to me?"

"I know nothing about it," said Frank; "but if our interview is only to consist in an examination of myself, the sooner it ends the better."

"Don't you see what I'm at, sir?—don't you perceive that I only want to know your honour's feeling towards me, and whether what I'm to say is to be laid up in your heart, or taken down in writing, and made into an indictment."

"My feeling towards you is easily told. If you be an honest man, and have any need of me, I'll stand by you; if you be not an honest man, but the dishonesty only affects myself and my interests, show me anything that can warrant it, and I'm ready to forgive you."

The prisoner hung down his head, and for some minutes seemed deeply immersed in reflection.

"Mr. Dalton," said he, drawing his chair closer to the bed, "I'll make this business very short, and we needn't be wasting our time talking over what is honesty and what is roguery—things every man has his own notions about, and that depend far more upon what he has in his pocket than what he feels in his heart. I can do *you* a good turn; *you* can do *me* another. The service I can render you will make you a rich man, and put you at the head of your family, where you ought to be. All I ask in return is, a free discharge from this gaol, and money enough to go to America. There never was a better bargain for you! As for myself, I could make more of my secret if I liked—more, both in money—and —and in other ways."

As he said these last few words, his cheek grew scarlet, and his eyes seemed to glisten.

"I scarcely understand you," said Frank. "Do you mean——"

"I'll tell you what I mean, and so plainly that you can't mistake me. I'll make you what you have good right to be—the 'Dalton of Corrig-O'Neal,' the ould place, that was in your mother's family for hundreds of years back. It isn't taking service in a foreign land you need be, but an Irish gentleman, living on his own lawful estate."

"And for this you ask——"

"Just what I told you—an open door and two hundred pounds down," said the fellow, with a rough boldness that was close on insolence. "I've told you already, that if I only wanted a good bargain, there's others would give more—but that's not what I'm looking for. I'm an old man," added he, in a softened voice, "and who knows when I may be called away to the long account!" Then suddenly, as it were correcting himself for a weak admission, he went on more firmly: "That's neither here nor there; the matter is just this: "Will you pay the trifle I ask, for three thousand a year, if it isn't more?"

"I must first of all consult with some friend——"

"There! that's enough. You've said it now! Mr. Dalton, I've done with you for ever," said the fellow, rising and walking to the window.

"You have not heard me out," said Frank, calmly. "It may be that I have no right to make such a compact; it may be that by such a bargain I should be compromising the just claims of the law, not to vindicate my own rights alone, but to seek an expiation for a dreadful murder!"

"I tell you again, sir," said the fellow, with the same sternness as before—"I tell you again, sir, that I've done with you for ever. The devil a day you'll ever pass under that same roof of Corrig-O'Neal as the master of it; and if you wish me to swear it, by the great——"

"Stop!" cried Frank, authoritatively. "You have either told me too much or too little, my good man; do not let your passion hurry you into greater peril."

"What do you mean by that?" cried the other, turning fiercely round, and bending over the back of the chair, with a look of menace. "What do you mean by too much or too little?"

"This has lasted quite long enough," said Frank, rising slowly from the bed. "I foresee little benefit to either of us from protracting it further."

"You think you have me now, Mr. Dalton," said Meekins, with a sardonic grin, as he placed his back against the door of the cell. "You think you know enough, now, as if I wasn't joking all the while. Sure what do I know of your family or your estate, except what another man told me? Sure I've no power to get back your property for you. I'm a poor man, without a friend in the world"—here his voice trembled and his cheek grew paler—"it isn't thinking of this life I am at all, but what's before me in the next!"

"Let me pass out," said Frank, calmly.

"Of course I will, sir,—I won't hinder you," said the other, but still not moving from the spot. "You said a while ago that I told you too much or too little. Just tell me what that means before you go."

"Move aside, sir," said Frank, sternly.

"Not till you answer my question. Don't think you're back with your white-coated slaves again, where a man can be flogged to death for a look! I'm your equal here, though I am in prison. Maybe, if you provoke me to it, I'd show myself more than your equal!" There was a menace in the tone of these last words that could not be mistaken, and Frank quickly lifted his hand to his breast; but, quick as was the gesture, the other was too speedy for him, and caught his arm before he could seize the pistol. Just at this critical moment the key was heard to turn in the lock, and the heavy door was slowly opened. "There, take my arm, sir," said Meekins, slipping his hand beneath Frank's; "you're far too weak to walk alone."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FENCING MATCH.

"You came in time—in the very nick, Mr. Gray," said Frank, with a quiet smile. "My friend here and I had said all that we had to say to each other."

"Maybe you'd come again—maybe you'd give me five minutes another time?" whispered Meekins, submissively, in Frank's ear.

"I think not," said Frank, with an easy significance in his look; "perhaps, on reflection, you'll find that I have come once too often!" And with these words he left the cell, and, in silent meditation, returned to his companion.

"The fellow's voice was loud and menacing when I came to the door," said Gray, as they walked along.

"Yes, he grew excited just at that moment; he is evidently a passionate man," was Frank's reply; and he relapsed into his former reserve.

Grounsell, who at first waited with most exemplary patience for Frank to narrate the substance of his interview, at last grew weary of his reserve, and asked him what had occurred between them.

Frank paid no attention to the question, but sat with his head resting on his hand, and evidently deep in thought. At last he said, slowly,—

"Can you tell me the exact date of Mr. Godfrey's murder?"

"To the day—almost to the hour," replied Grounsell. Taking out his pocket-book, he read, "It was on a Friday, the 11th of November, in the year 18—."

"Great God!" cried Frank, grasping the other's arm, while his whole frame shook with a strong convulsion. "Was it, then, on that night?"

"Yes," said the other, "the murder took place at night. The body, when discovered the next morning, was perfectly cold."

"Then that was it!" cried Frank, wildly. "It was then—when the light was put out—when he crossed the garden—when he opened the wicket——" A burst of hysteric laughter broke from him, and muttering, "I saw it—I saw it all," he fell back fainting into Grounsell's arms.

All the doctor's care and judicious treatment were insufficient to recall the youth to himself. His nervous system, shattered and broken by long illness, was evidently unequal to the burden of the emotions he was suffering under, and before he reached the hotel his mind was wandering away in all the incoherency of actual madness.

Next to the unhappy youth himself, Grounsell's case was the most pitiable. Unable to account for the terrible consequences of the scene whose events were a secret to himself, he felt all the responsibility of a calamity he had been instrumental in producing. From Frank it was utterly hopeless to look for any explanation; already his brain was filled with wild images of war and battle, mingled with broken memories of a scene which none around his bed could recognize. In his distraction Grounsell hurried to the gaol, to see and interrogate Meekins. Agitated and distracted as he was, all his prudent reserve and calm forethought were completely forgotten. He saw himself the cause of a dreadful affliction, and already cursed in his heart the wiles and snares in which he was engaged. "If this boy's reason be lost for ever, I, and I only, am in fault," he went on repeating as he drove in mad haste back to the prison.

In a few and scarcely coherent words he explained to Gray his wish to see the prisoner, and although apprised that he had already gone to rest, he persisted strongly, and was at length admitted into his cell.

Meekins started at the sound of the opening door, and called out gruffly, "Who's there?"

"It's your friend," said Grounsell, who had already determined on any sacrifice of his policy which should give him the hope of aiding Frank.

"My friend!" said Meekins, with a dry laugh. "Since when, sir?"

"Since I have begun to believe I may have wronged you, Meekins," said Grounsell, seating himself at the bedside.

"I see, sir," rejoined the other, slowly; "I see it all. Mr. Dalton has told you what passed between us, and you are wiser than he was."

"He has not told me everything, Meekins—at least not so fully and clearly as I wish. I want you, therefore, to go over it all again for me, omitting nothing that was said on either side."

"Ay," said the prisoner, dryly, "I see. Now, what did Mr. Dalton say to you? I'm curious to know—I'd like to hear how he spoke of me."

"As of one who was well disposed to serve him, Meekins," said Grounsell, hesitatingly, and in some confusion.

"Yes, to be sure," said the fellow, with a keen glance beneath his gathering brows. "And he told you, too, that we parted good friends—at least, as much so as a poor man like myself could be to a born gentleman like him."

"That he did," cried Grounsell, eagerly; "and young Mr. Dalton is not the man to think the worse of your friendship because you are not his equal in rank."

"I see—I believe I see it all," said Meekins, with the same sententious slowness as before. "Now look, doctor," added he, fixing a cold and steady stare on the other's features, "it is late in the night—not far from twelve o'clock—and I ask you, wouldn't it be better for you to be asleep in your bed, and leave me to rest quietly in mine, rather than be fencing—ay, fencing here—with one another, trying who is the deepest? Just answer me that, sir."

"You want to offend me," said Grounsell, rising.

"No, sir; but it would be offending yourself to suppose that it was worth your while to deceive the like of *me*—a poor, helpless man, without a friend in the world."

"I own I don't understand you, Meekins," said Grounsell, reseating himself.

"There's nothing so easy, sir, if you want to do it. If Mr. Dalton told you what passed between us to-night, you know what advice you gave him; and if he did not tell you, faix! neither will I—that's all. *He* knows what I have in my power. He was fool enough not to take me at my word. Maybe I wouldn't be in the same mind again."

"Come, come," said Grounsell, good-humouredly, "this is not spoken like yourself. It can be no object with you to injure a young gentleman who never harmed you; and if, in serving him, you can serve yourself, the part will be both more sensible and more honourable."

"Well, then," said Meekins, calmly, "I *can* serve him; and now comes the other question, 'What will he do for *me?*'"

"What do you require from him?"

"To leave this place at once—before morning," said the other, earnestly. "I don't want to see them that might make me change my mind; to be on board of a ship at Waterford, and away out of Ireland for ever, with three hundred pounds—I said two, but I'll want three—and for that—for that"—here he hesitated some seconds —"for that I'll do what I promised."

"And this business will never be spoken of more."

"Eh! what?" cried Meekins, starting.

"I mean that when your terms are complied with, what security have we that you'll not disclose this secret hereafter?"

Meekins slowly repeated the other's words twice over to himself, as if to weigh every syllable of them, and then a sudden flashing of his dark eyes showed that he had caught what he suspected was their meaning.

"Exactly so; I was coming to that," cried he. "We'll take an oath on the Gospel—Mr. Frank Dalton and myself—that never, while there's breath in our bodies, will we ever speak to man or mortal about this matter. I know a born gentleman wouldn't perjure himself, and, as for me, I'll swear in any way, and before any one, that your two selves appoint."

"Then there's this priest," said Grounsell, doubtingly. "You have already told him a great deal about this business."

"If he hasn't me to the fore, to prove what I said, *he* can do nothing; and as to the will, he never heard of it."

"The will!" exclaimed Grounsell, with an involuntary burst of surprise; and, brief as it was, it yet revealed a whole world of dissimulation to the acute mind of the prisoner.

"So, doctor," said the fellow, slowly, "I was right after all. You *were* only fencing with me."

"What do you mean?" cried Grounsell.

"I mean just this, that young Dalton never told you one word that passed between us—that you came here to pump me, and find out all I knew—that, 'cute as you are, there's them that's equal to you, and that you'll go back as wise as you came."

"What's the meaning of this change, Meekins?"

"It well becomes you, a gentleman, and a justice of the peace, to come to the cell of a prisoner in the dead of the night, and try to worm out of him what you want for evidence. Won't it be a fine thing to tell before a jury the offers you made me this night! Now, mind me, doctor, and pay attention to my words. This is twice you tried to trick me, for it was you sent that young man here. We've done with each other now; and may the flesh rot off my bones, like a bit of burnt leather, if I ever trust you again!"

There was an insolent defiance in the way these words were uttered, that told Grounsell all hope of negotiation was gone; and the unhappy doctor sat overwhelmed by the weight of his own incapacity and unskilfulness.

"There now, sir, leave me alone. To-morrow I'll find out if a man is to be treated in this way. If I'm not discharged out of this gaol before nine o'clock, *I*'ll know why, and *you*'ll never forget it, the longest day you live."

Crestfallen and dispirited Grounsell retired from the cell and returned to the inn.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A STEP IN VAIN.

GROUNSELL lost no time in summoning to his aid Mr. Hipsley, one of the leading members of the Irish bar; but while he awaited his coming, difficulties gathered around him from every side. Lenahan, the old farmer, who was at first so positive about the identity of the prisoner, began to express some doubts and hesitations on the subject. "It was so many years back since he had seen him, that it was possible he might be mistaken;" and, in fact, he laid far more stress on the fashion of a certain fustian jacket that the man used to wear than on any marks and signs of personal resemblance.

The bold defiance of Meekins, and his insolent threats to expose the Daltons to the world, assailed the poor doctor in various ways, and although far from feeling insensible to the shame of figuring on a trial, as having terrorized over a prisoner, the greater ruin that impended on his friends absorbed all his sorrows.

Had he been the evil genius of the family, he could scarcely have attained a greater degree of unpopularity. Frank's illness—for since the night at the gaol his mind had not ceased to wander—was, in Kate's estimation, solely attributable to Grounsell's interference—all the more unpardonable because inexplicable. Lady Hester regarded him as the disturber of all social relations, who, for some private ends, was involving everybody in lawsuits, and the old count had most natural misgivings about a man who, having assumed the sole direction of a delicate affair, now confessed himself utterly unable to see the way before him.

To such an extent had mortification and defeat reduced the unhappy doctor, that when Hipsley arrived he was quite unable to give anything like a coherent statement of the case, or lay before the astute lawyer the points whereon he desired guidance and direction. Meanwhile, the enemy were in a state of active and most menacing preparation. Meekins, discharged from gaol, was living at an inn in the town, surrounded by a strong staff of barristers, whose rank and standing plainly showed that abundant pecuniary resources supplied every agency of battle.

Numerous witnesses were said to have been summoned to give their evidence, and the rumour ran that the most ardent votary of private scandal would be satiated with the tales and traits of domestic life the investigation would expose to the world.

Hipsley, who with practised tact soon saw the game about to be played, in vain asked Grounsell for some explanation of its meaning. There was a degree of malignity in all the proceedings which could only be accounted for on the supposition of a long-nourished revenge. How was he to understand this? Alas! poor Grounsell knew nothing, and remembered nothing. Stray fragments of conversation, and scattered passages of bygone scenes, were jumbled up incoherently in his brain, and it was easy to perceive that a very little was wanting to reduce his mind to the helpless condition of Frank Dalton's.

The charge of a conspiracy to murder his relative brought against a gentleman of fortune and position, was an accusation well calculated to excite the most painful feelings of public curiosity, and such was now openly avowed to be the allegation about to be brought to issue; and, however repugnant to credulity the bare assertion might appear at first, the rumour was artfully associated with a strong array of threatening circumstances. Every trivial coldness or misunderstanding between Dalton and his brother-in-law Godfrey were now remembered and revived. All the harsh phrases by which old Peter used to speak of the other's character and conduct—Dalton's constant use of the expression, "What's the use of his money—will he ever enjoy it?"—was now cited as but too significant of a dreadful purpose; and, in a word, the public, with a casuistry which we often see, was rather pleased to credit what it flattered its own ingenuity to combine and arrange. Dalton was well known to have been a passionate, headstrong man, violent in his resentments, although ready to forgive and forget injuries the moment after. This temper, and his departure for the continent, from which he never returned, were all the substantial facts on which the whole superstructure was raised.

If Hipsley saw that the array of evidence was far from bringing guilt home to Dalton, he also perceived that the exposure alone would be a terrible blow to the suffering family. The very nature of the attack evinced a deep and hidden vengeance. To avert this dreadful infliction seemed, then, his first duty, and he endeavoured by every means in his power to ascertain who was the great instigator of the proceeding, in which it was easy to see Meekins was but a subordinate. The name of Father Cahill had twice or thrice been mentioned by Grounsell, but with a vagueness of which little advantage could be taken. Still, even with so faint a clue, Hipsley was fain to be content, and after several days' ineffectual search, he at last discovered that this priest, in company with another, was residing at the little inn of "The Rore."

Having communicated his plan to the old general, who but half assented to the idea of negotiating with the enemy, Hipsley set out for "The Rore," after a long day of fatiguing labour. "An inaccurate and insufficient indictment," repeated the lawyer to himself: "the old and hackneyed resource to balk the prurient curiosity of the public, and cut off the scent, when the gossiping pack are in full cry—this is all that we have now left to us. We must go into court: the only thing is to leave it as soon as we are able."

It was not till he was within half a mile of the little inn that Hipsley saw all the difficulty of what he was engaged in, for in what way, or on what pretext, was he to address Cahill in the matter, or by what right connect him with the proceedings? The hardihood by which he had often suggested to a witness what he wanted to elicit, stood his part now, and he boldly passed the threshold, and asked for Father Cahill. Mistaking him for the chief counsel on the other side, the landlord bowed obsequiously, and, without further parley, introduced him into the room where D'Esmonde and Cahill were then sitting.

"I see, gentlemen," said Hipsley, bowing politely to each, "that I am not the person you expected, but may I be permitted to enjoy an advantage which good fortune has given me, and ask of you a few moments' conversation? I am the counsel engaged by Mr. Dalton, in the case which on Tuesday next is to be brought to trial, and having learned from Mr. Grounsell that I might communicate with you in all freedom and candour, I have come to see if something cannot be done to rescue the honour of a family from the shame of publicity, and the obloquy that attends the exposure of a criminal court."

D'Esmonde took up a book as Hipsley began this address, and affected to be too deeply engaged in his reading to pay the least attention to what went forward, while Cahill remained standing, as if to intimate to the stranger the propriety of a very brief interruption.

"You must have mistaken the person you are addressing, sir," said the priest, calmly. "My name is Cahill."

"Precisely, sir; and to the Reverend Mr. Cahill I desire to speak. It is about ten days or a fortnight since you called on Dr. Grounsell with a proposition for the settlement of this affair. I am not sufficiently conversant with the details of what passed to say on which side the obstacle stood, whether *he* was indisposed to concede enough, or that *you* demanded too much. I only know that the negotiation was abortive, and it is now with the hope of resuming the discussion——"

"Too late, sir—too late," said the priest, peremptorily, while a very slight but decisive motion of D'Esmonde's brows gave him encouragement to be bold. "I did, it is true, take the step you allude to; a variety of considerations had their influence over me. I felt interested about the poor man Meekins, and was naturally anxious to screen from the consequences of shame a very old and honoured family of the country——" Here he hesitated, for a warning glance from the abbé recalled him to caution.

"And you were about to allude to that more delicate part of the affair which relates to Mr. Godfrey's son, sir?" interposed Hipsley, while by an unmistakable gesture he showed his consciousness of D'Esmonde's presence.

"I find, sir," said Cahill, coldly, "that we are gradually involving ourselves in the very discussion I have already declined to engage in. It is not here, nor by us, this cause must be determined. It would be hard to persuade me that you should even counsel an interference with the course of public justice."

"You are quite right, sir, in your estimate of me," said Hipsley, bowing; "nor should I do so, if I saw anything in this case but needless exposure and great cruelty towards those who must necessarily be guiltless, without one single good end obtained, except you could so deem the gratification of public scandal by the harrowing tale of family misfortune. Bear with me one moment more," said he, as a gesture of impatience from Cahill showed that he wished an end of the interview. "I will concede what I have no right to concede, and what I am in a position to refute thoroughly—the guilt of the party implicated; upon whom will the punishment fall? on the aged uncle, a brave and honoured soldier, without the shadow of stain on his fair fame—on a young and beautiful girl, whose life has already compassed more real sorrow than old men like myself have ever known in all their career—and on a youth, now stretched upon his sick-bed, and for whom humanity would rather wish death itself than to come back into a world he must shrink from with shame."

"'Filius peccatoris exardebit in crimine patris'—the son of the sinful man shall burn out in his father's shame!"—said D'Esmonde, reading aloud from the volume in his hand.

Hipsley almost started at the solemnity with which these awful words were uttered, and stood for a few seconds gazing on the pale and thoughtful face which was still bent over the book.

"My mission has then failed!" said the lawyer, regretfully. "I am sorry it should be so."

A cold bow was the only reply Cahill returned to this speech, and the other slowly withdrew, and took his way back to Kilkenny, the solemn and terrible denunciation still ringing in his ears as he went.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE COURT-HOUSE OF KILKENNY.

The character of crime in Ireland has preserved for some years back a most terrible consistency. The story of every murder is the same. The same secret vengeance; the same imputed wrong; the same dreadful sentence issued from a dark and bloody tribunal; the victim alone is changed, but all the rest is unaltered; and we read, over and over again, of the last agonies on the high road and in the noonday, till, sated and wearied, we grow into a terrible indifference as to guilt, and talk of the "wild justice of the people" as though amongst the natural causes which shorten human life. If this be so, and to its truth we call to witness those who, in every neighbourhood, have seen some fearful event—happening, as it were, at their very doors—deplored to-day, almost forgotten to-morrow; and while such is the case, the public mind is painfully sensitive as to the details of any guilt attended with new and unaccustomed agencies. In fact, with all the terrible catalogue before us, we should be far from inferring a great degree of guiltiness to a people in whom we see infinitely more of misguided energies and depraved passions, than of that nature whose sordid incentives to crime constitute the bad of other countries. We are not, in this, the apologist for murder. God forbid that we should ever be supposed to palliate, by even a word, those brutal assassinations which make every man blush to call himself an Irishman! We would only be understood as saying that these crimes, dark, fearful, and frequent as they are, do not argue the same hopeless debasement of our population as the less organized guilt of other countries; and inasmuch as the vengeance even of the savage is a nobler instinct than the highwayman's passion for gain, so we cherish a hope that the time is not distant when the peasant shall tear out of his heart the damnable delusion of vindication by blood, when he will learn a manly fortitude under calamity, a generous trust in those above him, and, better again, a freeman's consciousness that the law will vindicate him against injury, and that we live in an age when the great are powerless to do wrong, unless when their inhumanity be screened behind the darker shadow of the murder that avenges it! Then, indeed, we have no sympathy for all the sufferings of want, or all the miseries of fever; then, we forget the dreary hovel, the famished children, the palsy of age, and the hopeless cry of starving infancy,—we have neither eyes nor ears but for the sights and sounds of murder!

We have said, that amidst all the frequency of crime there is no country of Europe where any case of guilt accompanied by new agencies or attended by any unusual circumstances, is sure to excite so great and widespread interest. The very fact of an accusation involving any one in rank above the starving cottier is looked upon as almost incredible, and far from feeling sensibility dulled by the ordinary recurrence of bloodshed, the crime becomes associated in our minds with but one class, and as originating in one theme.

We have gradually been led away by these thoughts from the remark which first suggested them, and now we turn again to the fact, that the city of Kilkenny became a scene of the most intense anxiety as the morning of that eventful trial dawned. Visitors poured in from the neighbouring counties, and even from Dublin. The case had been widely commented on by the press; and although with every reserve as regarded the accused, a most painful impression against old Mr. Dalton had spread on all sides. Most of his own contemporaries had died; of the few who remained, they were very old men, fast sinking into imbecility, and only vaguely recollecting "Wild Peter" as one who would have stopped at nothing. The new generation, then, received the impressions of the man thus unjustly; nor were their opinions more lenient that they lived in an age which no longer tolerated the excesses of the one that preceded it. Gossip, too, had circulated its innumerable incidents on all the personages of this strange drama; and from the venerable Count Stephen down to the informer Meekins, every character was now before the world.

That the Daltons had come hundreds of miles, and had offered immense sums of money to suppress the exposure, was among the commonest rumours of the time, and that the failure of this attempt was now the cause of the young man's illness and probable death. Meekins's character received many commentaries and explanations. Some alleged that he was animated by an old grudge against the family, never to be forgivèn. Others said that it was to some incident of the war abroad that he owed his hatred to young Dalton; and, lastly, it was rumoured that, having some connection with the conspiracy, he was anxious to wipe his conscience of the guilt before he took on him the orders of some lay society, whose vows he professed. All these mysterious and shadowy circumstances tended to heighten the interest of the coming event, and the city was crowded in every part by strangers, who not only filled the Court-house, but thronged the street in front, and even occupied the windows and roofs of the opposite houses.

From daylight the seats were taken in the galleries of the Court; the most distinguished of the neighbouring gentry were all gathered there, while in the seats behind the bench were ranged several members of the peerage, who had travelled long distances to be present. To the left of the presiding judge sat Count Stephen, calm, stern, and motionless, as if on parade. If many of the ceremonials of the court and the general aspect of the assemblage were new and strange to his eyes; nothing in his bearing or manner bespoke surprise or astonishment. As little, too, did he seem aware of the gaze of that crowded assembly, who, until the interest of the trial called their attention away, never ceased to stare steadfastly at him.

At the corner of the gallery facing the jury-box D'Esmonde and Cahill were seated. The abbé, dressed with peculiar care, and wearing the blue silk collar of an order over his white cravat, was recognized by the crowd beneath as a personage of rank and consideration, which, indeed, his exalted and handsome features appeared well to corroborate. He sustained the strong stare of the assemblage with a calm but haughty self-possession, like one well accustomed to the public eye, and who felt no shrinking from the gaze of a multitude. Already the rumour ran that he was an official high in the household of the Pope, and many strange conjectures were hazarded on the meaning of his presence at the trial.

To all the buzz of voices, and the swaying, surging motion of a vast crowd, there succeeded a dead silence and tranquillity, when the judges took their seats on the bench. The ordinary details were all gone through with accustomed formality, the jury sworn, and the indictment read aloud by the clerk of the crown, whose rapid enunciation and monotonous voice took nothing from the novelty of the statement that was yet to be made by counsel. At length Mr. Wallace rose, and now curiosity was excited to the utmost. In slow and measured phrase he began by bespeaking the patient and careful attention of the jury to the case before them. He told them that it was a rare event in the annals of criminal law to arraign one who was already gone before the greatest of all tribunals; but that such cases had occurred, and it was deemed of great importance, not alone to the cause of truth and justice, that these investigations should be made, but that a strong moral might be read, in the remarkable train of incidents by which these discoveries were elicited, and men were taught to see the hand of Providence in events which, to unthinking minds, had seemed purely accidental and fortuitous. After dwelling for some time on this theme, he went on to state the great difficulty and embarrassment of his own position, called upon as he was to arraign less the guilty man than his blameless and innocent descendants, and to ask for the penalties of the law on those who had not themselves transgressed it.

"I do not merely speak here," said he, "of the open shame and disgrace the course of this trial will proclaim —I do not simply allude to the painful exposure you will be obliged to witness—I speak of the heavy condemnation with which the law of public opinion visits the family of a felon, making all contact with them a reproach, and denying them even its sympathy. These would be weighty considerations if the course of justice had not far higher and more important claims, not the least among which is the assertion to the world at large that guilt is never expiated without punishment, and that the law is inflexible in its denunciation of crime."

He then entered upon a narrative of the case, beginning with an account of the Dalton family, and the marriage which connected them with the Godfreys. He described most minutely the traits of character which separated the two men and rendered them uncompanionable one to the other. Of Godfrey he spoke calmly and without exaggeration; but when his task concerned Peter Dalton, he drew the picture of a reckless, passionate, and unprincipled man, in the strongest colours, reminding the jury that it was all-important to carry with them through the case this view of his character, as explaining and even justifying many of the acts he was charged with. "You will," said he, "perceive much to blame in him, but also much to pity, and even where you condemn deeply, you will deplore the unhappy combination of events which perverted what may have been a noble nature, and degraded by crime what was meant to have adorned virtue! From the evidence I shall produce before you will be seen the nature of the intimacy between these two men, so strikingly unlike in every trait of character, and although this be but the testimony of one who heard it himself from another, we shall find a strong corroboration of all in the consistency of the narrative and the occasional allusion to facts provable from other sources. We shall then show you how the inordinate demands of Dalton, stimulated by the necessity of his circumstances, led to a breach with his brother-in-law, and subsequently to his departure for the Continent; and, lastly, we mean to place before you the extraordinary revelation made to the witness Meekins, by his comrade William Noonan, who, while incriminating himself, exhibited Dalton as the contriver of the scheme by which the murder was effected.

"It would be manifestly impossible, in a case like this, when from the very outset the greatest secrecy was observed, and over whose mystery years have accumulated clouds of difficulty, to afford that clear and precise line of evidence which in a recent event might naturally be looked for. But you will learn enough, and more than enough, to satisfy your minds on every point. Meekins shall be subjected to any cross-examination my learned brother may desire, and I only ask for him so much of your confidence as a plain unvarying statement warrants. He is a stranger in this country; and although it has been rumoured, from his resemblance to a man formerly known here, that he has been recognized, we shall show you that for upwards of thirty years he has been in foreign countries, and while he understands that his parents were originally from the south of Ireland, he believes himself to have been born in America. These facts will at once disabuse your minds of the suspicion that he can have been actuated by any malicious or revengeful feelings towards the Daltons. We shall, also, show that the most strenuous efforts have been made to suppress his testimony; and while it may be painful to exhibit one charged with the administration of justice as having plotted to subvert or distort it, we shall produce on the witness-table the individual who himself made these very overtures of corruption."

A long and minute narrative followed—every step of the conspiracy was detailed—from the first communication of Dalton with Noonan, to the fatal moment of the murder. Noonan's own subsequent confession to Meekins was then related, and lastly the singular accident by which Meekins came in contact with the Abbé d'Esmonde, and was led to a revelation of the whole occurrence. The lawyer at last sat down, and as he did so, a low murmuring sound ran through the crowded assemblage, whose mournful cadence bespoke the painful acquiescence in the statement they had heard. More than one eager and sympathizing look was turned to where the old count sat; but his calm, stern features were passive and immovable as ever; and although he listened with attention to the address of the advocate, not a semblance of emotion could be detected in his manner.

Meekins was now called to the witness-box, and as he made his way through the crowd, and ascended the table, the most intense curiosity to see him was displayed. Well dressed, and with a manner of decent and respectful quietude, he slowly mounted the stairs, and saluted the bench and jury. Although an old man, he was hale and stout-looking, his massive broad forehead and clear grey eye showing a character of temperament well able to offer resistance to time.

There was an apparent frankness and simplicity about him that favourably impressed the court, and he gave his evidence with that blended confidence and caution which never fails to have its effect on a jury. He owned, too, that he once speculated on using the secret for his own advantage, and extorting a considerable sum from old Dalton's fears, but that on second thoughts he had decided on abandoning this notion, and resolved to let the mystery die with him. The accidental circumstance of meeting with the Abbé d'Esmonde, at Venice, changed this determination, and it was while under the religious teachings of this good priest that he came to the conviction of his sad duty. His evidence occupied several hours, and it was late in the afternoon when the cross-examination began.

Nothing within the reach of a crafty lawyer was left undone. All that practised skill and penetration could accomplish was exhibited, but the testimony was unshaken in every important point; and save when pushing the witness as to his own early life and habits, not a single admission could be extorted to his discredit. But even here his careless easy manner rescued him; and when he alleged that he never very well knew where he was born, or who were his parents, nor had he any very great misgivings about having served on board a slaver, and "even worse," the jury only smiled at what seemed the frank indifference of an old sailor. Noonan had given him a few scraps of Mr. Dalton's writing. He had lost most of them, he said; but of those which remained, although unsigned, the authenticity was easily established. Old Peter's handwriting was familiar to many, and several witnesses swore to their being genuine. In other respects, they were of little importance. One alone bore any real significance, and it was the concluding passage of a letter, and ran thus: "So that if I'm driven to it at last, Godfrey himself is more to blame than *me*." Vague as this menacing sentence was, it bore too home upon the allegations of the witness not to produce a strong effect, nor could any dexterity of the counsel succeed in obliterating its impression.

Seeing that the counsel for the prosecution had not elicited the testimony he promised, respecting the attempted subornation of Meekins, the defence rashly adventured upon that dangerous ground, and too late discovered his error, for the witness detailed various conversations between Grounsell and himself, and gave with terrible effect a scene that he swore had occurred between young Dalton and him in the gaol. It was in vain to remind the jury that he who alone could refute this evidence was stretched on a bed of sickness. The effect was already made.

When questioned as to the reasons Dalton might have had for conspiring against his brother-in-law, he confessed that Noonan only knew that Godfrey had refused him all assistance, and that he believed that after his death, he, Dalton, would inherit the property. His own impression was, however, that it was more vengeance than anything else. The Daltons were living in great poverty abroad; there was scarcely a privation which they had not experienced; and the embittering stings of their misery were adduced as the mainspring of old Peter's guilt. This allusion to the private life of the Dalton family was eagerly seized on by Mr. Wallace, who now "begged to ascertain certain facts on a subject which, but for his learned brother's initiative, he would have shrunk from exhibiting in open court." Meekins could, of course, but give such details as he had learned from Noonan, but they all described a life of suffering and meanness. Their contrivances, and their straits—their frequent change of place, as debt accumulated over them—their borrowings and their bills—and, lastly, the boastful pretexts they constantly brought forward on the rank of their uncle, Count Dalton, as a guarantee of their solvency and respectability. So unexpected was the transition to the mention of this name, that the whole assembly suddenly turned their eyes to where the old general sat, mute and stern; but the look he returned might well have abashed them, so haughty and daring was its insolence.

Apparently to show the knowledge possessed by the witness on matters of private detail—but, in reality, to afford an occasion for dilating on a painful subject—the whole history of the family was raked up, and all the sad story of Nelly's toil, and Kate's menial duties, paraded in open court, wound up, at last, with what was called young Frank's enlistment "as a common soldier of the Austrian army."

The greater interests of the trial were all forgotten in these materials for gossip, and the curiosity of the listeners was excited to its highest pitch when he came to tell of that mingled misery and ambition, that pride of name, and shameless disregard of duty, which he described as characterizing them; nor was the craving appetite for scandal half appeased when the court interrupted the examination, and declared that it was irrelevant and purposeless.

Meekins at last descended from the table, and Michel Lenahan was called up. The important fact he had so resolutely sworn to some weeks before he had already shown a disinclination to confirm, and all that he could now be brought to admit was, that he had believed Meekins was his old acquaintance, Black Sam; but the years that had elapsed since he saw him before, change of dress, and the effect of time on each of them, might well shake a better memory than his own.

"Jimmy Morris might know him again, my lord," said he, "for he never forgot anybody—but *he* isn't to the fore."

"I have the happiness to say that he is," said Hipsley. "He has arrived from Cove, here, this morning. Call James Morris, crier;" and soon after, a very diminutive old man, with a contracted leg, mounted the table. He was speedily sworn, and his examination commenced. After a few questions as to his trade—he was a tailor—and where he had lived latterly, he was asked whether he remembered, amongst his former acquaintance, a certain bailiff on the Corrig-O'Neal estate, commonly called Black Sam?

"By coorse I do," said he; "he was always making mischief between Mr. Godfrey and ould Peter."

"You have not been asked that question, sir," interposed Wallace.

"No, but he shall be, by-and-by," cried Hipsley. "Tell me, now, what kind of a man was this same Black Sam?"

"As cruel a man as ever you seen."

"That is not exactly what I am asking. I want to hear what he was like."

"He was like the greatest villain——"

"I mean, was he short or tall; was he a big man and a strong man, or was he a little fellow, like you or *me?*"

"Devil a bit like either of us. He'd bate us both with one hand—ay, and that fellow there with the wig that's laughing at us, into the bargain."

"So, then, he was large and powerful?"

"Yes, that he was."

"Had he anything remarkable about his appearance—anything that might easily distinguish him from other men?"

"'Tis, maybe, his eyes you mane?"

"What about his eyes, then?"

"They could be lookin' at ye when ye'd sware they were only lookin' at the ground; and he'd a thrick of stopping himself when he was laughing hearty by drawing the back of his hand over his mouth, this way."

As the witness accompanied these words by a gesture, a low murmur of astonishment ran through the court, for more than once during the morning Meekins had been seen to perform the very act described.

"You would probably be able to know him again if you saw him.

"That I would."

"Look around you, now, and tell me if you see him here. No, no, he's not in the jury-box; still less likely it is that you'd find him on the bench."

The witness, neither heeding the remark nor the laughter which followed it, slowly rose and looked around him.

"Move a little to one side, if ye plase," said he to a member of the inner bar. "Yes, that's him." And he pointed to Meekins, who, with crossed arms and lowering frown, stood still and immovable.

The bystanders all fell back at the same instant, and now he remained isolated in the midst of that crowded scene, every eye bent upon him.

"You're wearing well, Sam," said the witness, addressing him familiarly. "Maybe it's the black wig you've on; but you don't look a day oulder than when I seen you last."

This speech excited the most intense astonishment in the court, and many now perceived, for the first time, that Meekins did not wear his own hair.

"Are you positive, then, that this man is Black Sam?"

"I am."

"Are you prepared to swear to it on your solemn oath, taking all the consequences false evidence will bring down upon you?"

"I am."

"You are quite certain that it's no accidental resemblance, but that this is the very identical man you knew long ago?"

"I'm certain sure. I'd know him among a thousand, and, be the same token, he has a mark of a cut on the crown of his head, three inches long. See, now, if I'm not right."

Meekins was now ordered to mount the witness-table, and remove his wig. He was about to say something, but Wallace stopped him, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"I would beg to observe," said the lawyer, "that if an old cicatrix is to be the essential token of recognition, few men who have lived the adventurous life of Meekins will escape calumny."

"'Tis a mark like the letter V," said Jimmy, "for it was ould Peter himself gave it him, one night, with a brass candlestick. There it is!" cried he, triumphantly; "didn't I tell true?"

The crowded galleries creaked under the pressure of the eager spectators, who now bent forward and gazed on this strong proof of identification.

"Is there any other mark by which you could remember him?"

"Sure, I know every fayture in his face—what more d'ye want?"

"Now, when did you see him last—I mean before this day?"

"The last time I seen him was the mornin' he was taken up."

"How do you mean 'taken up'?"

"Taken up by the polis."

"Taken by the police—for what?"

"About the murder, to be sure."

A thrill of horror pervaded the court as these words were spoken, and Meekins, whose impassive face had never changed before, became now pale as death.

"Tell the jury what you saw on the morning you speak of."

"I was at home, workin', when the polis passed by. They asked me where Black Sam lived; 'Up the road,' says I."

"How far is your house from his?"

"About fifty perches, your honor, in the same boreen, but higher up."

"So that, in going from Mr. Godfrey's to his own home, Sam must have passed your door?"

"Yes, sir."

"This he did every day—two or three times—didn't he?"

"He did, sir."

"Did you usually speak to each other as he went by?"

"Yes, sir; we always would say, 'God save you,' or the like."

"How was he dressed on these occasions?"

"The way he was always dressed—how would he be?"

"That's exactly what I'm asking you."

"Faix! he had his coat and breeches, like any other man."

"I see. He had his coat and breeches, like any other man—now, what colour was his coat?"

"It was grey, sir—blue-grey. I know it well."

"How do you come to know it well?"

"Bekase my own boy, Ned, sir, bought one off the same piece before he 'listed, and I couldn't forget it."

"Where were you the day after the murder, when the policemen came to take Sam Eustace?"

"I was sitting at my own door, smoking a pipe, and I see the polis comin', and so I went in and shut the door."

"What was that for? You had no reason to fear them."

"Ayeh!—who knows—the polis is terrible!"

"Well, after that?"

"Well, when I heard them pass, I opened the door, and then, I saw enough. They were standing at Sam's house; one of them talking to Sam, and the other two rummaging about, sticking poles into the thatch, and tumbling over the turf in the stack."

"'Isn't this a pretty business?' says Sam, calling out to me. 'The polis is come to take me off to prison, because some one murdered the master.' 'Well, his soul's in glory, anyhow,' says I, and I shut the doore."

"And saw nothing more?"

"Only the polis lading Sam down the boreen betune them."

"He made no resistance, then?"

"Not a bit: he went as quiet as a child. When he was going by the doore, I remember he said to one of the polis, 'Would it be plazing to ye to help me wid my coat, for I cut my finger yesterday?'"

"Didn't I say it was with a reaping-hook?" cried Meekins, who, in all the earnestness of anxiety, followed every word that fell from the witness.

His counsel sprang to his feet, and pulled him back by the arm, but not before the unguarded syllables had been heard by every one around. Such was the sensation now produced, that for several minutes the proceedings were interrupted; while the counsel conferred in low whispers together, and all seemed thunderstruck and amazed. Twice Meekins stood forward to address the court, but on each occasion he was restrained by the counsel beside him, and it was only by the use of menaces that Wallace succeeded in enforcing silence on him. "When the moment of cross-examination arrives," said he to the jury, "I hope to explain every portion of this seeming difficulty. Have you any further questions to ask the witness?"

"A great many more," said Hipsley. "Now, Morris, attend to me. Sam asked the police to assist him, as he had cut his hand with a reaping-hook?"

"He did, indeed, sir," said the witness; "and a dreadful cut it was. It was hard for him to get his hand into the sleeve of the jacket."

"I perceive; he had difficulty in putting on the jacket, but the policemen helped him?"

"They did, sir, and one of them was hurting him, and Sam called out, 'Take care—take care. It's better to cut the ould sleeve; it's not worth much, now.'"

"And did they cut it?"

"They did, sir; they ripped it up all the way to the elbow."

"That was a pity, wasn't it, to rip up a fine frieze coat like that?"

"Oh, it wasn't his coat at all, sir. It was only a flannel jacket he had for working in."

"So, then, he did not wear the blue-grey frieze like your son's when he went to gaol?"

"No, sir. He wore a jacket."

"Now, why was that?"

"Sorry one o' me knows; but I remember he didn't wear it.'

"Didn't I say that I left my coat at the bog, and that I was ashamed to go in the ould jacket?" screamed out Meekins, whose earnestness was above all control.

"If this go on, it is impossible that I can continue to conduct this case, my lord," said Wallace. "While no attempt has been made to refute one tittle of the great facts I have mentioned, a system of trick has been resorted to, by which my client's credit is sought to be impugned. What care I, if he was known by a hundred nicknames. He has told the court already that he has lived a life of reckless adventure—that he has sailed under every flag, and in every kind of enterprise. Mayhap, amid his varied characters, he has played that of a land bailiff; nor is it very strange that he should not wish to parade before the world the fact of his being arrested, even under a false accusation, for he was discharged, as he has just told you, two days after."

A large bundle, carefully sealed, was now carried into the court, and deposited before Mr. Hipsley, who, after a few seconds' consultation with Grounsell, rose, and addressed the court,—

"My learned friend complains of being surprised; he will, perhaps, have a better right to be so in a few moments hence. I now demand that this man be consigned to the dock. These affidavits are all regular, my lord, and the evidence I purpose to lay before you will very soon confirm them."

The judge briefly scanned the papers before him, and, by a gesture, the command was issued, and Meekins, who never uttered a word, was conducted within the dock.

"I will merely ask the witness two or three questions more," added Hipsley, turning towards the gaoler, who alone, of all the assembly, looked on without any wonderment.

"Now, witness, when did you see the prisoner wear the blue-grey coat? After the death of Mr. Godfrey, I mean."

"I never seen him wear it again," was the answer.

"How could ye?" cried Meekins, in a hoarse voice. "How could ye? I sailed for America the day after I was set at liberty."

"Be silent, sir," said the prisoner's counsel, who, suffering greatly from the injury of these interruptions, now assumed a look of angry impatience, while, with the craft of his calling, he began already to suspect that a mine was about to be sprung beneath him.

"You have told us," said Hipsley—and, as he spoke, his words came with an impressive slowness that made them fall deep into every heart around—"you have told us that the coat worn habitually by the prisoner, up to the day of Mr. Godfrey's murder, you never saw on him after that day. Is that true?"

"It is, sir."

"You have also said that this coat—part of a piece from which your son had a coat—was of a peculiar colour?"

"It was, sir; and more than that, they had both the same cut, only Sam's had horn buttons, and my son's was metal."

"Do you think, then, from the circumstances you have just mentioned, that you could know that coat if you were to see it again?"

A pause followed, and the witness, instead of answering, sat with his eyes fixed upon the dock, where the prisoner, with both hands grasping the iron spikes, stood, his glaring eyeballs riveted upon the old man's face, with an expression of earnestness and terror actually horrible to witness.

"Look at me, Morris," said Hipsley, "and answer my question. Would you know this coat again?"

"That is, would you swear to it?" interposed the opposite counsel.

"I believe I would, sir," was the answer.

"You must be sure, my good man.. Belief is too vague for us here," said the prisoner's lawyer.

"Is this it?" said the solicitor, as, breaking the seals of the parcel before him, he held up a coat, which, ragged and eaten by worms, seemed of a far darker colour than that described by witness.

The old man took it in his hands and examined it over carefully, inspecting with all the minute curiosity of age every portion of the garment. The suspense at this moment was terrible—not a syllable was spoken—not a breath stirred—nothing but the long-drawn respirations of the prisoner, who, still leaning on the iron railing of the dock, watched the old man's motions with the most harrowing intensity.

"Let me see it on him," said the witness, at last.

"Prisoner, put on that coat," said the judge.

Meekins tried to smile as he proceeded to obey, but the effort was too much, and the features became fixed into one rigid expression, resembling the look of hysteric laughter.

"Well, do you know me now?" cried he, in a voice whose every accent rang with a tone of intimidation and defiance.

"I do," said the witness, boldly. "I'll swear to that at, my lord, and I'll prove I'm right. It was the same stuffing put into both collars; and if I'm telling you the truth, it's a piece of ould corduroy is in that one there."

The very grave was not more still than the court as the officer of the gaol, taking off the coat, ripped up the collar, and held up in his hand a small piece of tarnished corduroy.

"My lord! my lord! will you let a poor man's life be swore away——"

"Silence, sir,—be still, I say," cried the prisoner's counsel, who saw the irremediable injury of these passionate appeals. I am here to conduct your defence, and I will not be interfered with. Your lordship will admit that this proceeding has all the character of surprise. We were perfectly unprepared for the line my learned friend has taken——"

"Permit me to interrupt the counsel, my lord. I need scarcely appeal to this court to vindicate me against any imputation such as the learned gentleman opposite would apply to me. Your lordship's venerable predecessors on that bench have more than once borne witness to the fairness and even the lenity of the manner in which the crown prosecutions have been conducted. Any attempt to surprise, any effort to entrap a prisoner, would be as unworthy of us as it would be impossible in a court over which you preside. The testimony which the witness has just given, the extraordinary light his evidence has just shown, was only made available to ourselves by one of those circumstances in which we see a manifestation of the terrible judgment of God upon him who sheds the blood of his fellow-man. Yes, my lord, if any case can merit the designation of Providential intervention, it is this one. Every step of this singular history is marked by this awful characteristic. It is the nephew of the murdered man by whom the first trace of crime has been detected. It is by him that we have been enabled to bring the prisoner into that dock. It is by him that a revelation has been made which, had it not occurred in our own day and under our own eyes, we should be disposed to class amongst the creations of fiction. The learned counsel has told you that these articles of clothing have been produced here by surprise. This affidavit is the shortest answer to that suspicion. From this you will see that, early this morning, young Mr. Dalton requested that two magistrates of the city should be brought to his bedside, to take down the details of an important declaration. The fever which for several days back had oppressed him, had abated for the time, and he was, although weak and low, calm and collected in all his faculties. It was then, with remarkable accuracy, and in a manner totally free from agitation, that he made the following singular revelation." The counsel then recited, at more length than would suit our reader's patience to follow, the story of Frank's visit to Ireland when a boy, and his accidental presence in the grounds of Corrig-O'Neal on the very night of the murder. "At first the magistrates were disposed to regard this revelation as the mere dream of an erring intellect; but when he described every feature of the locality, and the most intricate details of scenery, their opinion was changed; and when at last he designated the exact spot where he had seen a large bundle buried, it only needed that this should be confirmed to establish the strict truth of all he alleged. With every care and precaution against deception, the magistrates proceeded to visit the place. They were accompanied by several persons of character and station, in presence of whom the examination was made. So accurate was the narrative, that they found the spot without difficulty, and, on digging down about two feet, they came upon the articles which you now see before you. These, without any examination, they at once sealed up in presence of the witnesses, and here for the first time have they been displayed to view."

As the counsel had reached thus far, the fall of a heavy body resounded through the court, and the cry was raised that the prisoner had been seized with a fit.

"No, my lord," exclaimed the lawyer; "fatigue and weariness alone have produced this effect. My unhappy client is no more proof against exhaustion than against slander."

"My lord! my lord!" cried the prisoner, as, holding by the spikes of the dock, he leaned forwards over it, "can't I get justice? Is it my coat——"

"Sit down, sir," said his counsel, angrily; "leave this to *me*."

"What do you care what becomes of me?" cried the other, rudely. "Where's Father Cahill? Where's——" At this instant his eyes met those of D'Esmonde, as, seated in the gallery immediately above him, he watched the proceedings with an agonizing interest only second to the prisoner's own. "Oh, look what you've brought me to!" cried he, in an accent of heartbroken misery; "oh, see where I'm standing now!"

The utterance of these words sent a thrill through the court, and the judge was obliged to remind the prisoner that he was but endangering his own safety by these rash interruptions.

"Sure I know it, my lord; sure I feel it," cried he, sobbing; "but what help have I? Is there no one to stand by me? You're looking for marks of blood, ain't ye?" screamed he to the jury, who were now examining the coat and cap with great attention. "And there it is now—there it is!" cried he, wildly, as his eyes detected a folded paper that one of the jurymen had just taken from the coat-pocket. "What could I get by it?—sure the will couldn't do me any harm."

"This *is* a will, my lord," said the foreman, handing the document down to the bench. "It is dated, too, on the very night before Mr. Godfrey's death."

The judge quickly scanned the contents, and then passed it over to Mr. Hipsley, who, glancing his eyes over it, exclaimed, "If we wanted any further evidence to exculpate the memory of Mr. Dalton, it is here. By this will, signed, sealed, and witnessed in all form, Mr. Godfrey bequeathed to his brother-in-law his whole estate of Corrig-O'Neal, and, with the exception of some trifling legacies, names him heir to all he is possessed of."

"Let me out of this—leave me free!" shouted the prisoner, whose eye-balls now glared with the red glow of madness. "What brought me into your schemes and plots?—why did I ever come here? Oh, my lord, don't see a poor man come to harm that has no friends. Bad luck to them here and hereafter, the same Daltons! It was ould Peter turned me out upon the world, and Godfrey was no better. Oh, my lord! oh, gentlemen! if ye knew what druv me to it—but I didn't do it—I never said I did. I'll die innocent!"

These words were uttered with a wild volubility, and, when over, the prisoner crouched down in the dock, and buried his face in his hands. From that instant he never spoke a word. The trial was prolonged till late into the night; a commission was sworn and sent to the inn, to examine young Dalton, and interrogate him on every point. All that skill and address could do were exerted by the counsel for the defence; but, as the case proceeded, the various facts only tended to strengthen and corroborate each other, and long before the jury retired their verdict was certain.

"Guilty, my lord!" And, well known and anticipated as the words were, they were heard in all that solemn awe their terrible import conveys.

The words seemed to rouse the prisoner from his state, for, as if with a convulsive effort, he sprang to his legs, and advanced to the front of the dock. To the dreadful question of the judge, as to what he had to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon him, he made no answer, and his wild gaze and astonished features showed an almost unconsciousness of all around him. From this state of stupor he soon rallied, and, grasping the iron spikes with his hands, he protruded his head and shoulders over the dock, while he carried his eyes over the assembled crowd, till at last they lighted on the spot where Cahill and D'Esmonde were seated—the former pale and anxious-looking, the latter with his head buried in his hands. The prisoner nodded with an insolent air of familiarity to the priest, and muttered a few broken words in Irish. Again was the terrible demand made by the judge; and now the prisoner turned his face towards the bench, and stood as if reflecting on his reply.

"Go on," cried he at last, in a tone of rude defiance; and the judge, in all the passionless dignity of his high station, calmly reviewed the evidence in the case, and gave his full concurrence to the verdict of the jury.

"I cannot conclude," said he, solemnly, "without adverting to that extraordinary combination of events by which this crime, after a long lapse of years, has been brought home to its guilty author. The evidence you have heard to-day from Mr. Dalton—the singular corroboration of each particular stated by him in the very existence of the will, which so strongly refutes the motive alleged against the late Mr. Dalton—were all necessary links of the great chain of proof; and yet all these might have existed in vain were it not for another agency—too eventful to be called an accident—I allude to the circumstance by which this man became acquainted with one who was himself peculiarly interested in unfathoming the mystery of this murder: I mean the Abbé D'Esmonde. The name of this gentleman has been more than once alluded to in this trial, but he has not been brought before you, nor was there any need that he should be. Now the abbé, so far from connecting the prisoner with the crime, believed him to be the agency by which it might have been fastened on others; and to this end he devoted himself with every zeal to the inquiry. Here, then, amidst all the remarkable coincidences of this case, we find the very strangest of all, for this same abbé—the accidental means of rescuing the prisoner from death at Venice, and who is the chief agent in now bringing him to punishment here—this abbé is himself the natural son of the late Mr. Godfrey. Sent when a mere boy to St. Omer and Louvain to be educated for the Roman Catholic priesthood, he was afterwards transferred to Salamanca, where he graduated, and took deacon's orders. Without any other clue to his parentage than the vague lines of admission in the conventual registry, the cheques for money signed and forwarded by Mr. Godfrey, this gentleman had risen by his great talents to a high and conspicuous station before he addressed himself to the search after his family. I have no right to pursue this theme further; nor had I alluded to it at all, save as illustrating in so remarkable a manner that direct and unmistakable impress of the working of Providence in this case, showing how, amidst all the strange chaos of a time of revolution and anarchy—when governments were crumbling, and nations rending asunder—this one blood-spot—the foul deed of murder—should cry aloud for retribution, and, by a succession of the least likely incidents, bring the guilty man to justice."

After a careful review of all the testimony against the prisoner—the conclusiveness of which left no room for a doubt—he told him to abandon all hope of a pardon in this world, concluding, in the terrible words of the law, by the sentence of death,—

"You, Samuel Eustace, will be taken from the bar of this court to the place from whence you came, the gaol, and thence to the place of execution—there to be hung by the neck till you are dead——"

"Can I see my priest—may the priest come to me?" cried the prisoner, fiercely, for not even the appalling solemnity of the moment could repress the savage energy of his nature.

"Miserable man," said the judge, in a faltering accent, "I beseech you to employ well the few minutes that remain to you in this world, and carry not into the next that spirit of defiance by which you would brave an earthly judgment-seat. And may God have mercy on your soul!"

CHAPTER XL.

THE RETRIBUTION.

The sudden flash of intelligence by which young Frank was enabled to connect the almost forgotten incidents of boyhood with the date and the other circumstances of the murder, had very nearly proved fatal to himself. His brain was little able to resist the influence of all these conflicting emotions, and for some days his faculties wandered away in the wildest and most incoherent fancies. It was only on the very morning of the trial that he became self-possessed and collected. Then it was that he could calmly remember every detail of that fatal night, and see their bearing on the mysterious subject of the trial. At first Grounsell listened to his story as a mere raving; but when Frank described with minute accuracy the appearance of the spot—the old orchard, the stone stair that descended into the garden, and the little door which opened into the wood—he became eagerly excited; and, anxious to proceed with every guarantee of caution, he summoned two other magistrates to the bedside to hear the narrative. We have already seen the event which followed that revelation, and by which the guilt of the murderer was established.

From hour to hour, as the trial proceeded, Frank received tidings from the court-house. The excitement, far from injuring, seemed to rally and re-invigorate him; and although the painful exposure of their domestic circumstances was cautiously slurred over to his ears, it was plain to see the indignant passion with which he heard of Nelly and Kate being dragged before the public eye. It was, indeed, a day of deep and terrible emotion, and when evening came he sank into the heavy sleep of actual exhaustion. While nothing was heard in the sick room save the long-drawn breathings of the sleeper, the drawing-rooms of the hotel were crowded with the gentry of the neighbourhood, all eager to see and welcome the Daltons home again. If the old were pleased to meet with the veteran Count Stephen, the younger were no less delighted with even such casual glimpses as they caught of Kate, in the few moments she could spare from her brother's bedside. As for Lady Hester, such a torrent of sensations, such a perfect avalanche of emotion, was perfect ecstasy; perhaps not the least agreeable feeling being the assurance that she no longer possessed any right or title to Corrig-O'Neal, and was literally unprovided for in the world.

"One detests things by halves," said she; "but to be utterly ruined is quite charming."

The country visitors were not a little surprised at the unfeigned sincerity of her enjoyment, and still more, perhaps, at the warm cordiality of her manner towards them—she who, till now, had declined all proffers of acquaintanceship, and seemed determined to shun them.

Consigning to her care all the duties of receiving the crowd of visitors, which old Count Stephen was but too happy to see, Kate only ventured for a few minutes at a time to enter the drawing-room. It was while hastening back from one of these brief intervals that she heard her name spoken, in a low but distinct voice. She turned round, and saw a man, closely enveloped in a large cloak, beside her.

"It is I, Miss Dalton—the Abbé D'Esmonde," said he. "May I speak with your brother?"

Kate could hardly answer him from terror. All the scenes in which she had seen him figure rose before her view, and the man was, to her eyes, the very embodiment of peril.

"My brother is too ill, sir, to receive you," said she. "In a few days hence——"

"It will then be too late, Miss Dalton," said he, mournfully. "The very seconds as they pass, now, are as days to one who stands on the brink of eternity."

"Is there anything which I could communicate to him myself? for I am fearful of what might agitate or excite him."

If it must be so," said he, sighing, and as if speaking to himself. "But could you not trust me to say a few words? I will be most cautious."

"If, then, to-morrow——"

"To-morrow! It must be now—at this very instant!" cried he, eagerly. "The life of one who is unfit to go hence depends upon it." Then, taking her hand, he continued: "I have drawn up a few lines, in shape of a petition for mercy to this wretched man. They must be in London by to-morrow night, to permit of a reprieve before Saturday. Your brother's signature is all-essential. For this I wished to see him, and to know if he has any acquaintanceship with persons in power which could aid the project. You see how short the time is—all depends upon minutes. The Secretary of State can suspend the execution, and in the delay a commutation of the sentence may be obtained."

"Oh, give it to me!" cried she, eagerly. And, snatching the paper from his hands, she hurried into the chamber.

Frank Dalton was awake, but in all the languor of great debility. He scarcely listened to his sister, till he heard her pronounce the name of the Abbé D'Esmonde.

"Is he here, Kate?—is he here?" cried he, eagerly.

"Yes, and most anxious to see and speak with you."

"Then let him come in, Kate. Nay, nay, it will not agitate me."

Kate noiselessly retired, and, beckoning the abbé to come forward, she left the room, and closed the door.

D'Esmonde approached the sick-bed with a cautious, almost timid, air, and seated himself on a chair, without speaking.

"So, then, we are cousins, I find," said Frank, stretching out his wasted hand towards him. "They tell me you are a Godfrey, abbé?"

D'Esmonde pressed his hand in token of assent, but did not utter a word.

"I have no wish—I do not know if I have the right—to stand between you and your father's inheritance. If I am destined to arise from this sick-bed, the world is open to me, and I am not afraid to encounter it. Let us be friends, then, D'Esmonde, in all candour and frankness."

"Willingly—most willingly. There need be but one rivalry between us," said D'Esmonde, with a voice of deep feeling—"in the struggle who shall best serve the other. Had we known of this before—had I suspected how our efforts might have been combined and united—had I but imagined you as my ally, and not my—— But these are too exciting themes to talk upon. You are not equal to them."

"Not so; it is in such moments that I feel a touch of health and vigour once again. Go on, I beseech you."

"I will speak of that which more immediately concerns us," said the abbé. "This wretched man stands for execution on Saturday. Let us try to save him. His guilt must have already had its expiation in years of remorse and suffering. Here is a petition I have drawn up to the Secretary of State. It has been signed by several of the jury who tried the cause. We want your name also to it. Such a commutation as may sentence him to exile is all that we pray for."

"Give me the pen; I'll sign it at once."

"There—in that space," said the abbé, pointing with his finger. "How your hand trembles. This cannot be like your usual writing."

"Let me confirm it by my seal, then. You'll find it on the table yonder."

D'Esmonde melted the wax, and stood beside him, while the youth pressed down the seal.

"Even that," said the abbé, "might be disputed. There's some one passing in the corridor; let him hear you acknowledge it as your act and hand." And, so saying, he hastened to the door, and made a sign to the waiter to come in. "Mr. Dalton desires you to witness his signature," said he to the man.

"I acknowledge this as mine," said Frank, already half exhausted by the unaccustomed exertion.

"Your name, there, as witnessing it," whispered D'Esmonde; and the waiter added his signature.

"Have you hope of success, abbé?" said Frank, faintly.

"Hope never fails me," replied D'Esmonde, in a voice of bold and assured tone. "It is the only capital that humble men like myself possess; but we can draw upon it without limit. The fate of riches is often ruin, but there is no bankruptcy in hope. Time presses now," said he, as if suddenly remembering himself; "I must see to this at once. When may I come again?"

"Whenever you like. I have much to say to you. I cannot tell you now how strangely you are mixed up in my fancy—it is but fancy, after all—with several scenes of terrible interest."

"What!—how do you mean?" said D'Esmonde, turning hastily about.

"I scarcely know where to begin, or how to separate truth from its counterfeit. Your image is before me, at times and in places where you could not have been. Ay, even in the very crash and tumult of battle, as I remember once at Varenna, beside the Lake of Como. I could have sworn to have seen you cheering on the peasants to the attack."

"What strange tricks imagination will play upon us!" broke in D'Esmonde; but his voice faltered, and his pale cheek grew paler as he said the words.

"Then, again, in the Babli Palace at Milan, where I was brought as a prisoner, I saw you leave the council-chamber arm-in-arm with an Austrian archduke. When I say I saw you, I mean as I now see you here—more palpable to my eyes than when you sat beside my sick-bed at Verona."

"Dreams—dreams," said D'Esmonde. "Such illusions bespeak a mind broken by sickness. Forget them, Dalton, if you would train your thoughts to higher uses." And, so saying, in a tone of pride, the abbé bowed, and passed out.

As D'Esmonde passed out into the street, Cahill joined him.

"Well," cried the latter, "is it done?"

"Yes, Michel," was the answer; "signed, and sealed, and witnessed in all form. By this document I am recognized as a member of his family, inheriting that which I shall never claim. No," cried he, with exultation of voice and manner, "I want none of their possessions; I ask but to be accounted of their race and name; and yet the time may come when these conditions shall be reversed, and they who would scarcely own me to-day may plot and scheme to trace our relationship. Now for Rome. To-night—this very night—I set out. With this evidence of my station and fortune there can be no longer any obstacle. The struggle is past—now to enjoy the victory!"

"You will see him before you go, D'Esmonde? A few minutes is all he asks."

"Why should I? What bond is there between us now? The tie is loosened for ever; besides, he deceived us, Michel—deceived us in everything."

"Be it so," said the other; "but remember that it is the last prayer of one under sentence of death—the last wish of one who will soon have passed away hence."

"Why should I go to hear the agonizing entreaties for a mercy that cannot be granted—the harrowing remorse of a guilty nature?"

"Do not refuse him, D'Esmonde. He clings to this object with a fixed purpose, that turns his mind from every thought that should become the hour. In vain I speak to him of the short interval between him and the grave. He neither hears nor heeds me. His only question is, 'Is he coming—will he come to me?'"

"To lose minutes, when every one of them is priceless—to waste emotions, when my heart is already racked and tortured—why should I do this?" cried D'Esmonde, peevishly.

"Do not refuse *me*, D'Esmonde," said Cahill, passionately. "I despair of recalling the miserable man to the thought of his eternal peril till this wish be satisfied."

"Be it so, then," said the abbé, proudly; and he walked along beside his friend in silence.

They traversed the streets without a word spoken. Already D'Esmonde had assumed an air of reserve, which seemed to mark the distance between himself and his companion; the thoughtful gravity of his look savoured no less of pride than reflection. In such wise did Cahill read his manner, and by a cautious deference appear to accept the new conditions of their intimacy.

"The prisoner has not uttered a word since you were here, sir," said the gaoler, as they entered the gate. "He shows the greatest anxiety whenever the door opens; but, as if disappointed at not seeing whom he expected, relapses at once into his silent reserve."

"You see that he still expects you," whispered Cahill to the abbé: and the other assented with a faint nod of the head.

"No, sir; this way," said the gaoler; "he is now in the condemned cell." And, so saying, he led the way along the corridor.

By the faint light of a small lamp, fixed high up in the wall, they could just detect the figure of a man, as he sat crouched on the low settle-bed, his head resting on his arms as they were crossed over his knees. He never moved as the grating sound of the heavy door jarred on the stillness, but sat still and motionless.

"The Abbé D'Esmonde has come to see you, Eustace," said the gaoler, tapping him on the shoulder. "Wake up, man, and speak to him."

The prisoner lifted his head and made an effort to say something, but though his lips moved, there came no sounds from them. At last, with an effort that was almost convulsive, he pointed to the door, and said, "Alone—alone!"

"He wants to speak with you alone, sir," whispered the gaoler, "and so we will retire."

D'Esmonde could not see them leave the cell without a sense of fear—less the dread of any personal injury than the strange terror so inseparable to any close communion with one convicted of a dreadful crime—and he actually shuddered as the massive door was banged to.

"You are cold, sir!" said the prisoner, in a hollow, sepulchral voice.

"No, it was not cold!" replied D'Esmonde.

"I can guess what it was, then!" said the other, with an energy to which passion seemed to contribute. "But I'll not keep you long here. Sit down, sir. You must sit beside me, for there is no other seat than the settle-bed. But there is nobody here to see the great Abbé D'Esmonde side by side with a murderer."

"Wretched man," said D'Esmonde, passionately, "by what fatality did you rush upon your fate? Why did you ever return to this country?"

"It is to tell you that—ay, that very thing—I asked you to come here to-night," said the prisoner, with a firm, full voice. "I came here for *you*—just so—for *you your-*

self. There, there," continued he, haughtily, "don't look as if I wanted to trick you. Is it here, is it now, that a lie would sarve me? Listen to me, and don't stop me, for I want to turn my thoughts to something else when this is off my heart. Listen to me. Very soon after you saved me at Venice, I knew all about you; who you were, and what you were planning—ay, deep as you thought yourself, I read every scheme in you, and opened every letter you wrote or received. You don't believe me. Shall I give you a proof? Did you accept eight bills for money Morlache the Jew sent you, from Florence, in March last? Did Cardinal Antinori write to say that the Bull that named you cardinal must have your birth set forth as noble? Did the Austrian Field-Marshal send you the cross of St. Joseph, and did you not return it, as, to wear it, would unmask you to the Italians?"

"What if all this were true?" said D'Esmonde, proudly. "Is it to one like you I am to render account for my actions? What is it to you if——"

"What is it to *me?*" cried the other, fiercely—"what is it to me? Isn't it everything? Isn't it what brought me here, and what in three days more will bring me to the gallows? I tell you again, I saw what you were bent on, and I knew you'd succeed—ay, that I did. If it was good blood you wanted to be a cardinal, I was the only one could help you."

"You knew the secret of my birth, then?" cried D'Esmonde, in deep earnestness. "You could prove my descent from the Godfreys?"

"No! but I could destroy the only evidence against it," said the other, in a deep, guttural voice. "I could tear out of the parish registry the only leaf that could betray you; and it was for that I came back here; and it was for that I'm now here. And I did do it. I broke into the vestry of the chapel at midnight, and I tore out the page, and I have it here, in my hand, this minute. There was a copy of this same paper at the college at Louvain, but I stole that, too; for I went as porter there, just to get an opportunity to take it—that one I destroyed."

"But whence this interest in my fortunes?" said D'Esmonde, half proudly, for he was still slow to believe all that he heard.

"The paper will tell you that," said the other, slowly unfolding it, and flattening it out on his knee. "This is the certificate of your baptism! Wait—stop a minute," cried he, catching D'Esmonde's arm, as, in his impatience, he tried to seize the paper. "This piece of paper is the proof of who you are, and, moreover, the only proof that will soon exist to show it."

"Give it to me—let me see it!" cried D'Esmonde, eagerly. "Why have you withheld till this time what might have spared me anxious days and weary nights; and by what right have you mixed yourself up with my fortunes?"

"By what right is it—by what right?" cried the other, in a voice which passion rendered harsh and discordant. "Is that what you want to know?" And, as he spoke, he bent down and fixed his eyes on the abbé with a stern stare. "You want to know what right I have," said he, and his face became almost convulsed with passion. "There's my right—read that!" cried he, holding out the paper before D'Esmonde's eyes. "There's your birth proved and certified: 'Matthew, son of Samuel and Mary Eustace, of Ballykinnon, baptized by me this 10th day of April, 18—. Joseph Barry, P.P.' There's the copy of your admission into the convent, and here's the superior's receipt for the first quarter's payment as a probationer. Do you know who you are now? or do you still ask me what right I have to meddle in your affairs?"

"And you—and you—you——" cried D'Esmonde, gasping.

"I am your father. Ay, you can hear the words here, and needn't start at the sound of them. We're in the condemned cell of a gaol, and nobody near us. You are my son. Mr. Godfrey paid for you as a student till—till —— But it's all over now. I never meant you to know the truth; but a lie wouldn't serve you any longer. Oh, Matthew, Matthew!" cried he—and of a sudden his voice changed, and softened to accents of almost choking sorrow—"haven't you one word for me?—one word of affection for him that you brought to this, and who forgives you for it?—one word, even to call me your own father?" He fell at the other's feet, and clasped his arms around his knees as he spoke, but the appeal was unheard.

Pale as a corpse, with his head slightly thrown forward, and his eyes wildly staring before him, D'Esmonde sat, perfectly motionless. At last the muscles of his mouth fashioned themselves into a ghastly smile, a look of mockery so dreadful to gaze upon that the prisoner, terror-stricken at the sight, rushed to the door, and beat loudly against it, as he screamed for help. It was opened on the instant, and the gaoler, followed by two others, entered.

"He's ill; his reverence is taken bad," said the old man, while he trembled from head to foot with agitation.

"What's this paper? What is he clutching in his hands?" cried the gaoler.

D'Esmonde started at the words. For the first time a gleam of intelligence shot over his features, and as suddenly he bent a look of withering hate on the speaker; and then, with a passionate vehemence that told of a frantic brain, he tore the paper into fragments, and, with a wild yell, as if of triumph, he fell senseless on the ground. When they lifted him up, his features were calm, but passionless, his eye was vacant, and his lips slightly parted. An expression of weariness and exhaustion, rather than of actual pain, pervaded the face. He never spoke again. The lamp of intellect was extinguished for ever, and not even a flicker or a spark remained to cheer the darkness within him. Hopeless and helpless idiotcy was ever after the lot of one whose mind, once stored with the most lofty ambitions, never scrupled, at any cost, to attain its object. And he whose proud aspirings soared to the very grandest of earthly prizes, who gave his counsel among princes, now lives on, bereft of mind and intelligence, without consciousness of the past, or a hope for the future.

* * *

CHAPTER XLI.

THE END.

With the sad episode which closes our last chapter we would fain let fall the curtain on this history. Very few words will now suffice to complete the narrative of those with whom we have so long sojourned. The discovery which revealed the murder of Mr. Godfrey restored Frank Dalton to the home and fortune of his family; and although the trying scenes through which he had passed made deep and dangerous inroads on his health, youth and hope, and the watchful care of Kate, restored him; and, after the lapse of some weeks, he was enabled to be about once more, recalling to the recollection of many the handsome figure and manly bearing of his father.

For many a year before, Corrig-O'Neal had not seen such a party beneath its roof, nor had those gloomy old walls echoed to such sounds as now were heard within them. In addition to Lady Hester, George Onslow, now a colonel, was the guest of the Daltons. Scarcely arrived in England, he quitted London at the moment when the tidings of his gallant achievements had made him the hero of the day, and hurried to see *her* who, through every change of his fortunes, had been the dearest object of his heart.

What tender reproaches—what heart-warm confessions—did those old woods hear, as, side by side, the lovers walked along, revealing the secret sorrows of the past, and recalling each incident which once had cheered with hope or shadowed with despair. But it is not in such company we would play the "eavesdropper," nor watch for the changeful blushes of that soft cheek where tears of joy and grief are mingled. Neither would we care to accompany Grounsell, as with deeds and bonds, codicils and conveyances, he actually hunted poor Frank from place to place, urgently impressing on him the necessity for those "business habits," the sad neglect of which had been the ruin of all the Daltons. As little inducement is there to follow Lady Hester, whose restless activity was interfering with every one and everything, taking the most lively interest in the property the very moment it ceased to be her own, and devoted to all the charities which no longer could lay claim to being duties.

Pleasanter, perhaps, would it be to follow the old count, as he sauntered alone for hours, trying to trace out in the long-forgotten scenes the stories of his boyhood. What pleasant reveries they were!—what glorious compensations for all the tumultuous passages of an eventful life! And so he felt them! And so he recognized with grateful heart the happy destiny which had befallen him, to close his days where he had begun them—in the midst of his own—loving and beloved.

And yet with such scenes and emotions we must not dally. Story-tellers, like Mother Carey's chickens, have no sympathies with sunny skies and soft airs—their province is amidst the hurricane and the storm. In truth, too, it is the very essence of tranquil enjoyment that it must be left to the imagination of each to conceive.

But one care weighed on all, and that was the absence of poor Nelly. Why was she not amongst them, to see their happiness, and heighten its enjoyment by all the benevolence of her kindly nature? It was true they were relieved of all anxiety regarding her by a letter which had followed them from Vienna, and which told how she had arrived in that city a few days after they had left it.

"I stood," she said, "looking at the great palace where they told me Count Stephen lived, and could not bring myself to think it was not a dream that such as *I* should have business there!

"I sat down on the steps of a church in front of it, and gazed for hours long at the great door through which you must have passed so often, and the windows which doubtless you stood at—perhaps thinking of poor Nelly! At last came Hanserl to say that he had obtained leave to see the palace, and oh, how my heart beat at the words—for there was pride as well as humiliation in the thought—and so we went in, and, crossing the great court, ascended the wide staircase. How beautiful it all was, those marble statues—the rich frescoes of the ceilings—the gorgeous lamps, all emblazoned with armorial emblems; and yet I thought less of these than the polished steps which your feet had trodden, and which I could have kissed for your sake.

" I had not imagined so much magnificence. You will smile, perhaps, at my simplicity, but so did not that kind old soldier with the wooden leg, who took such pains to show us everything. He was evidently pleased to witness our admiring wonder, and actually laughed at Hanserl's enthusiasm for all those bright scimitars and shields of Turkish make, the horse-tailed banners, and other emblems of Austrian victory; while I stole away silently into a little chamber all hung with blue damask, over the mantelpiece of which was a portrait of our own dear Frank. How I felt that the room was yours, Kate—how my heart told me each object you had touched—and how they all became to my delighted senses like precious relics, revealing stores of affection laid up in your bosom, and showing a wealth of love I was not conscious of till then. Oh no, dearest sister, I never knew, till then, how things without life themselves can be the links between beating hearts! I looked everywhere for a portrait of yourself, and it was only by asking the old corporal that I succeeded in finding it. 'The Gräfin's picture is in the Field-Marshal's own room,' said he, with pride, and led the way towards it. Oh, Kate, how beautiful!—nay, it is Nelly, your own stern Nelly, who never flattered you herself, nor could bear others to do so—it is Nelly, the same Nelly, unchanged, save in being less trustful, less impulsive, less forgiving than you knew her, and *she* tells you that at sight of such loveliness she stood wonderstruck and fascinated. Had you been really then before me, such as the picture represented, I had not dared to approach you; there was that of nobility and grandeur that had appalled my poor peasant heart, unused to the glitter of diamonds and the queenly air of high-born beauty; but, as I gazed on the likeness, long and steadily, this expression faded away, and, as though the lineaments were changing, I thought the eyes grew softer; they seemed to moisten, the lips trembled, the bosom heaved and fell, and it was you—you! as I had pressed you to my heart a thousand times—my own! my own!

"I know not what foolish words I may have uttered, nor to what excess my rapture carried me, but I was weeping bitterly as they led me away—ay, bitterly, Kate; for such ecstasy as I felt finds its true vent in sorrow! But now I am happy once more—happy that I have seen you and dear Frank—happy that each of us in life has trodden the path that best became him! and so I came away, with many a lingering look, and many a backward glance, at what I was never to see again.

"Here, in my mountain home, once more I can sit, alone, and think of you for days long. You wander through all my thoughts, the characters of endless stories, in every imaginable vicissitude, and with every change of fortune; but throughout all, Kate—good and beautiful—truthful too, as you ever were. There, my tears have blotted out what I tried to say, nor dare I trust myself with more. My school children are already coming through the vineyard; I hear their song—it was your own long ago:

'Da sind die Täge lang genuch,
Da sind die Nachte milde.'

"Good-bye, good-bye, my sister—my dear sister.

"N. D.

"Meran."

"Oh! let us hasten thither at once," cried Kate, in rapture. "Oh! dear uncle, let us away to Meran."

"Not till after Tuesday, Kate," whispered George, passionately; and the words covered her cheeks with blushes as she heard them.

The reader knows now all that we care to tell him. Time was when story-tellers wound up with a kind wish that, "if they were not happy, that you and I may be." Nor am I quite certain that we are wiser in our vocation than when those words were in vogue.

We are not vain enough to suppose that we have inspired an interest for any of those characters who have supported the minor parts of our drama. Should such good fortune have happily attended us, let us say, once for all, that Messrs. Haggerstone, Jekyl, and Purvis yet survive; that the Ricketts family are in excellent health, autograph gathering and duke courting, poetising and painting, and pilfering, with all the ardour of youth, untouched by years and unrestrained by conscience. Lady Hester, too, is again living abroad, and, after trying three new changes of religion, is in treaty with a Heidelberg professor for a "spick-and-span" new faith, which will transcend everything hitherto known, and make even Mormonism ashamed of itself.

As for Prince Midchekoff, he and my Lady Norwood are the delight of a foreign city which shall be nameless, and their receptions nightly crowded by all the fashionable celebrities and distinguished visitors of that favoured region.

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