THE WHITE ROSE.

VOL. III.

THE WHITE ROSE.

BY

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THE WHITE ROSE.

CHAPTER I.

WITHOUT.

It was early spring in London, so early that the east winds had not thoroughly set in, and the mild genial weather gladdened the very vegetables in the areas, and the crossing-sweepers, who had plenty to do after the thaw, in the streets. It was to be an early season too, so people said; and though squares and crescents had not yet put on their tender green dresses that wear so badly through summer dust and smoke —though asparagus had not appeared in the market, and lamb was still thirteen-pence a pound,—knockers began to thunder, carriages to roll, cards to pour in, and the business of life seemed about to commence for young ladies of the upper class, from seventeen

to seven-and-twenty, waking out of winter lethargy into the delightful hurry and excitement of the season.

A good many people were already in town. Mrs. Vandeleur had left off her widow's cap, and reduced the depth of her crape borders. Dolly Egremont, after a grand quarrel with Miss Tregunter, who had spent several months in the south of France, and never shown since, was up to his ears in theatrical affairs. His correspondence with the American actress alone, who, always coming, had not yet arrived, would have kept one secretary in full employment; and while he was good-humoured and friendly as ever, he looked (for him) harassed and worn with too much to do, something on his mind, and not a single moment to spare.

Dandy Burton was going about as usual; had left cards on the White Rose more than once—nay, had even shaken hands when he met her by accident in the street, though against her will. And Gerard Ainslie, with capital lodgings in Jermyn Street, was ordering carriages, buying hacks, giving dinner-parties, and making acquaintances with the greatest rapidity, for he had come into some six or seven thousand a year.

Yes, the wheel had turned at last. His great-uncle was dead, not having thoroughly forgiven him, and, indeed, having made several wills, in which all he possessed was left away from his nearest relation. When an elderly gentleman marries his housekeeper, it is to be supposed that he takes so decided a step from personal knowledge of her character and long familiarity with her good qualities. He does not always find, however, that she makes him as good a wife as she did a servant, and disappointment under such circumstances at the failure of an article is generally proportioned to the price paid for it. In the present instance hatred and disgust soon replaced whatever sentiments of affection or esteem had induced the old man to commit such an absurdity; and nobody but his lawyer would have had patience with the childish irritation that caused him day after day to dictate and destroy different testamentary dispositions of his handsome property. At last, in a fit of unreasonable anger against his wife, he left everything to his great-nephew, and died the following morning, in a fit of apoplexy.

Gerard Ainslie now found himself extricated, if not from penury, at least from very narrow circumstances, and raised to considerable wealth. The

change arriving in the full flush and prime of manhood, was like a new life. A very young man coming into possession of a large fortune, hardly appreciates either the advantages he has gained, or the inconveniences from which he has escaped. Later, when the bloom is off the flower once for all, nothing can excite him to great exultation, and he has probably learned the inevitable lesson of experience, that happiness, never found when sought, is independent of externals, and springs exclusively from within. But for one who has been through the privations and annoyances of poverty while at an age to feel their edge most keenly, to emerge from them at a time of life when hope has not yet sunk below the horizon, when the sap is still rising in the tree, such a transformation of self and surroundings is light after darkness, summer after winter, health after sickness, freedom after captivity, pleasure after pain.

No man in London was better qualified than Gerard Ainslie to appreciate such an alteration in his fortunes. Brought up with the tastes and habits of an English gentleman, he united the love of luxury and refinement with the delight in rough athletic exercises peculiar to his class. This combi-

nation can hardly be considered economical; and a man who wants to tire three horses in a day, risking neck and limbs over High Leicestershire, ere he returns to a dinner-party, music, and the society of half-a-dozen charming women at night, should have a purse as deep as his desire for pleasure is inexhaustible, should be placed by Fortune in a position that admits of his wasting time, energy, health, and capital in the pursuit of mere amusement. Gerard, as we know, had been what is called a "good fellow" all his life. A *bon camarade* at the diggings, a jovial companion at a mess-table or in a club, with men he was sure to be popular, from his frank, pleasant temper, his high spirit, and something womanly at his heart. The ladies had made a favourite of him from boyhood. To their deeper perceptions there had always been something fascinating about his eyes and smile. They liked him none the worse now that his whiskers were grown, and he had the reputation of being a traveller, an adventurer, a "man with a history," above all a capital *parti*.

So, in a few weeks, he was asked to a great variety of places, saddled with a vast number of engagements, any of which (and this made him none the less

popular) he was ready to throw over at a moment's notice, and altogether launched on the world of London with a fair wind and a flowing tide.

We all know the story of the princess and her rumpled rose-leaf felt through half-a-score of blankets. Gerard also had a leaf or two that worried him in the bed of roses to which he had lately climbed. In the first place, his play had not yet been acted, although, as may easily be imagined, his accession to wealth had in no way detracted from the merits of a piece which Dolly's friendship had accepted when the author was poor. Still he was eager to behold it on the stage; and in the short period during which necessity compelled him to wield the pen, he had contracted a jealous anxiety for publicity, an insatiable desire for fame, such as poisons the content of most inexperienced authors, dramatic and otherwise.

Pope Clement, or the Cardinal's Collapse, had not yet been put in rehearsal. Everything depended on the American actress, and the American actress depended on a New York public and the sou'-westers of the Atlantic. Till she arrived he could not answer the questions showered on him by every acquaintance in the street, "When is

your play coming out ? "—this was rose-leaf number one.

Rose-leaf number two gave him a good deal more uneasiness. He was in a continual fidget about Mrs. Vandeleur. The notice of her husband's death in the *Times* did not, indeed, surprise him as much as the rest of the London world, who had chosen to consider her a widow for some years, but it had opened up a range of speculation that all the duties and pleasures of his new position seemed unable to drive out of his head. She had but lately returned to town, he knew that, for in the set amongst whom he now lived it was no longer necessary to tamper with servants for information of her movements. She had been down to Oakover. He wondered whether she visited her father's parsonage, the road across the marshes, the old haunts that were in his memory still like "holy ground," and whether she thought of *him ?* He could bear it no longer; see her he must, and all unconscious of the genial spring weather, he started nervously on foot for her residence, dreading mainly his recognition by Robert Smart, and the contingency of her not being at home.

In spite of his agitation, he could not forbear

smiling as he walked along, and remembered how different had been his passage through the streets of London a few short months ago, when every day's dinner was uncertain, and he could not even afford decent clothes to his back. Now the very crossing-sweepers, who tripped him up, called him "my lord." Hansom cab-drivers, eyeing him respectfully from their perches, shot imploring glances to take him in. Taper fingers were kissed and pretty heads bowed at him from well-appointed carriages, while dandies, for whom nothing on earth seemed good enough, stopped to clap him familiarly on the shoulder and take him by the hand.

It was pleasant, it was exhilarating; but he had been a gold-digger; he had been a settler; he had served one voyage, when at his worst, before the mast,—and it did not turn his head the least. Jack, who shared his last quid with him that night in the whale-boat, was perhaps quite as good a fellow as Lord Frederick; Tom, who nursed him through low fever in the swamps, had a pleasanter way with him than Sir Harry, and looked indeed a good deal more like a gentleman. Nay, something happened at Hyde Park Corner that could scarcely have taken place in San Francisco or Ballarat.

Two remarkably well-dressed young men, walking arm-in-arm, stopped short ten paces off, and crossed Piccadilly at the muddiest part, as if to avoid a meeting. He recognised them both. One, indeed, had the grace to blush deeply while he picked his way through the dirt, and his letter Gerard could feel at that moment in his own breast-pocket, requesting the loan of a large sum of money; but the other only laughed, and with reason, for he had borrowed a couple of hundred the week before from the man he seemed so anxious to avoid, and the joke was probably enhanced by the small probability of his ever being able to pay!

Gerard felt so hurt, the tears almost rose to his eyes. "Hang it!" he muttered, "I can't be such a bad fellow as they take me for; and I thought they were friends — real friends I could depend upon. I've met some staunch ones in my life, but I wonder how many I've got left!"

It set him thinking; the behaviour of these young gentlemen puzzled him. He did not see that they were merely acting up to a wholesome rule for the enjoyment of life, which forbids people, under any circumstances, to run the slightest risk of

being bored. They felt, doubtless with some tact, that there would be a certain amount of *gêne* about a meeting, till the one's loan and the other's letter had been forgotten. So, they simply avoided it. Perhaps they were right; but Gerard had worn a red shirt and carried a pick-axe too lately to see the matter in that light, and he turned down Grosvenor Place, reflecting with some bitterness that there was but one good fellow in the whole of London, and his name was Dolly Egremont.

A block of carriages in Halkin Street, checking the stream of foot-passengers, brought him on to that gentleman's very shoulders. The two naturally hooked arms, and walked forward together.

Gerard's heart was full. He pressed his friend's elbow to his side.

"Old fellow," said he, "don't think me a beast! I'm not really ungrateful. I've never half thanked you for the hand you gave me when I was so deep in the hole—I've never had a chance."

"Nonsense!" answered Dolly, with an Englishman's insurmountable repugnance to all expression of sentiment, "you would have done just the same for me! But it's all right now, isn't it?"

"Right!" replied the other. "I'm in clover,

my dear fellow; I positively roll in riches. Look here, I never can repay your kindness and consideration; but with regard to the money, that kept me from starving, you know. By Jove—literally from starving! It's nothing to me now, but it was everything then, and altogether it amounts to a goodish sum, and it must have inconvenienced you with that theatre on your hands, and—in short——"

Gerard was getting confused, and could not put into proper language what he wanted to say. His friend turned round on him and stood still.

"I've never told you," said he—"I never knew whether I might—Jerry, you ought to know—the money didn't come from me; at least, very little of it; there was another party in the case, a party you'd hardly guess, who 'parted' freely, like a brick!"

"Not Burton!" exclaimed Gerard, in an accent of considerable alarm.

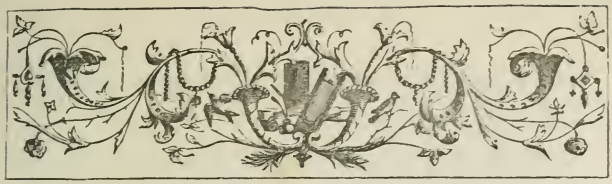
"No; not Burton!" repeated the other. "Quite the reverse, I may say. What do you think of the White Rose, my boy? It was, I give you my honour! Every shilling I forwarded you in those three different drafts came from Mrs. Vandeleur."

Gerard Ainslie started as if he had been shot.

"Mrs. Vandeleur!" was all he could gasp. "I was going to call there now."

"You'll find her at home," answered the other, looking at his watch. "She never drives till four o'clock. Good-bye, Jerry; it's time I was at the Accordion."

And Dolly, hailing a passing hansom, was carried off forthwith, leaving his friend at Mrs. Vandeleur's door, in a whirl of conflicting feelings, amongst which a sense of unspeakable happiness predominated. If nervous before, judge what he was now. He never knew how he rang the bell, who opened the door, by what process he got up-stairs, or whether he entered Mrs. Vandeleur's drawing-room on his head or his heels!



CHAPTER II.

WITHIN.

She had been thinking of him all the morning. Sitting with her feet on the fender, and her work in her lap, she was thinking of him even then. She had come to London earlier than she intended, earlier, indeed, than Lady Baker and other counsellors, strict guardians of the *convenances*, had advised, in the hope that on that restless, shifting, ever-varying sea, they might, after all those years of separation, be drifted together once more.

The night her husband died had afforded Norah one of those glimpses into reality that sometimes reveal to us the misapprehensions and misconceptions under which we too often shape our conduct. It was the sudden clearing off, so to speak, of a fog in which she had been wandering

with false impressions of latitude, longitude, locality, and general bearings.

Roused to a temporary consciousness by Burton's unjustifiable intrusion, Vandeleur had taken advantage of his restored faculties to make his wife the only amends left before re-action came on and the lamp of life was extinguished for ever. Holding her hand, looking in her face, with the bright still cunning eyes, that never formerly, even in his best days, could thus meet her own, he confessed the treachery he had practised towards herself and the inexperienced boy, whom he knew she had loved from the first. He detailed, with something of the old graceful flattery, so touching in this helpless, dying invalid, the effect of her charms on his worn, world-wearied heart. He had loved her in his selfish way as well, he told her, as it was in his nature to love anything but his own desires, and this very affection had wrought out his punishment. He saw it all now, but too late. Of course too late! Every fool could tell how the game should have been played after the tricks were turned. He knew he had no chance so long as Gerard Ainslie remained his rival; and was he, the finished practised *roué*, to be beaten in a race for such a prize by a raw lad of

nineteen? Not if he knew it. All was fair in love and war. Norah remembered Fanny Draper, didn't she? Pretty, good-for-nothing, black-eyed girl at the mill? Well, he had bribed Miss Fanny to make up to the young gentleman on her own account, to follow him about, report his actions, intercept his correspondence, marry him herself if she could! And the jade had earned her money fairly enough. Fairly enough he must admit. What an intriguing, unscrupulous little devil it was! The old sinner chuckled and gasped, and grew so weak at this stage of his narrative, that Norah, propping him on his pillows, thought it was all over, and she would hear no more.

But he recovered to bid her mark that he was going fast, and she would soon find he had at least thought of her welfare at the very time he felt most unhappy that he could not win her entire affections. There had been a handsome provision made for her in case of his insanity. He was mad from the first, he said; he always knew it! At his death she would succeed to Oakover and everything he had to leave. It was a dull place, Oakover, in a dull country! A fellow had better be dead and buried at once than obliged to live in such a hole as that,

but he wouldn't have her cut the Avenue. No, it would make the place look like a private mad-house to cut the Avenue! He should know what a private mad-house was if anybody did. There had been a clause in his will by which she was to forfeit the estate if she married again. But he had made that all right. When, did she think? Why, just before they went abroad, when he began to feel she could never care for him as he wished. Oh, he had fought fair! At least he had done nothing beyond the rules of the game. He could not bring himself to wish even now that he had let Gerard alone, and withdrawn from the contest. He had never been beat, never, till forced to yield under this cursed family affliction that had beaten the best of the Vandeleurs for many generations. Well, Norah was always a good kind-hearted girl; she would forgive him, perhaps, after he was gone. The mischief wasn't irremediable, when you came to think of it. Why, Fanny Draper might die, or be divorced more likely—that vixen never could keep steady, not if she married a duke! And then, when Norah was settled at Oakover with Gerard, she would think kindly of old John Vandeleur. She wouldn't turn his picture to the wall, would she?

And she had better let the Avenue alone. He was getting tired now, and he thought he should like to go to sleep a little.

It is needless to say there were doctors in plenty round Vandeleur's death-bed. They shook their heads as they marked his faint breathing and the waxen placidity into which his features were subsiding, handsome even yet, and noble, in the dignity of approaching immortality. But one of these wise men whispered that a crisis had arrived, and it was the last chance for life. Norah, only now awakening to the perfidy of which she had been a victim, only now realising the liberty that dawned on her, the possibility of happiness that might still fall to her lot, hated herself for the guilty start of apprehension with which she heard there was yet this vague hope of a reprieve. Then she went and prayed on her knees that the black drop might be wrung out of her heart, returning to her husband's bed-side with an honest wish for his recovery, and tending him once more with all the care she had bestowed during his long-protracted illness. But he never knew her again. Towards midnight he breathed harder, muttering his first wife's name. She heard him distinctly ask for "Margaret" more

than once ere he relapsed into a tranquil sleep, from which he passed calmly and insensibly through the gates of death. All this came back to her now, sitting in her solitary drawing-room with eyes fixed on the fire. All this, and a good deal more. It was well, no doubt, to be handsome, rich, free, unencumbered; above all, it was well to have been able, at a moment's notice and without personal inconvenience, to cancel her obligations to Mr. Burton; but the White Rose felt, nevertheless, very much as Burns's Scottish maiden in the difficulty of choice which ladies of all ranks have to encounter. Many an aching heart under satin corset, as under serge bodice, has echoed the burden of her bitter plaint,—

> "What care I in riches to wallow,
> If I may not marry Tam Glen!"

Mrs. Vandeleur could appreciate the advantages of her position, for she was a lady of refinement and education, but she was also a true-hearted woman, and would rather have worked for her daily bread in a two-pair-back with Gerard Ainslie, than lived, as she did now, in one of the prettiest houses in London without him.

She had heard of his accession to fortune, and rejoiced in it, she firmly believed, with all her heart and soul. In this notion she egregiously deceived herself. My own conviction is, that she would have been much better pleased to have found him without a penny, and to have had the delight of lavishing on him, from her own stores, everything he most wished for in the world. Besides, there was one startling consideration. As little prone to jealousy as it is possible for a woman to be, the White Rose was yet not wholly invulnerable to that uncomfortable sentiment. She speculated, reasonably enough, on the unlikelihood that such a man as she esteemed her former lover should pass scathless through the fascinating ranks of her own sex, when, in addition to his natural advantages, he came to possess the adventitious aids of wealth and position. Somebody would be sure to make love to him; she could think of a dozen on the instant. It was impossible but that he would respond. "And how can I help it?" murmured Mrs. Vandeleur, pushing her chair back from the glowing fire which had scorched her face and eyes to some purpose. "What can I do if we never meet? I can't go and call upon *him*, and I do

believe he has quite forgotten everything, for he has never been to call upon *me!*"

The words, half-spoken, had risen to her lips, when the door was thrown open, and Robert Smart announced a visitor, without the slightest emotion, as "Mr. Ainslie!"

On the stage, at such a crisis, ladies have the unspeakable advantage of fainting dead away "opposite prompter" into the very arms of the favoured lover, to be brought to again when the fiddle has played eight bars, and they have gained a few moments to recollect their cue and think of what they ought to say next. But in real life, unexpected emotion only makes people look foolish instead of interesting. And if the well-drilled servant had remained another second in the drawing-room, which he did not, he would have considered his mistress a fitting inmate of that "Asylum for Females of Weak Intellect" which he so often passed with the carriage on its way to Kew Gardens, and her visitor, whom he did not think it his business to recognise, an escaped lunatic fresh from the incurable ward at St. Bethlehem's.

Both stood for a moment trembling, stupefied, open-mouthed; then they shook hands, muttering

something about "such a long time," and "didn't know you were in town." After which, a blank, alarming pause, and Gerard was glad to sit down in the nearest chair, clinging instinctively to his hat as the drowning man holds on to a life-buoy.

With a woman's inborn tact, she would have given him time to recover, feeling herself the necessity of a moment's breathing-space; but he was too far gone to take advantage of such forbearance, and plunged headlong into conversation. He had not spoken with her since they parted, avowed lovers, all those years ago. Looking on her face again—or rather at the hem of her garment, for he scarce could trust himself to meet her eyes, not knowing they were studying the pattern of the hearth-rug—he felt in every fibre of his being that the present moment was worth all the sorrow and anxiety of a lifetime; that she was dearer to him, if possible, than ever; and this was the original remark he chose to make: "What a lovely day, Mrs. Vandeleur! So pleasant after our long frost." She took a good look at him now. He was very much what she expected; a little browner, perhaps, and broader-shouldered, but the eyes and smile were Gerard's. In a moment, too, something of manner, gesture,

perhaps the tremble in his voice, told her woman's instinct that he was *her* Gerard still. She gained confidence rapidly, and answered with commendable steadiness, "The old story in our English climate, Mr. Ainslie—no two days alike. Unchanged even in its changes. You—you won't find anything much changed since you went away." She was not; he could tell that now when he found courage to look in her winsome face. The witch was as bewitching as ever; a little paler, he thought, than the girl he had seen every night by those watch-fires in his dreams; darker of hair, perhaps; fuller in form; the features even more delicately cut than Miss Welby's; but with the old queenly air, the well-remembered grace of gesture; above all, the tender, fleeting smile that lingered less about her mouth than in those deep, dreamy, loving eyes. He had thought her more changed that night in the summer, when he caught a glimpse of her getting into her carriage after the ball. She saw right through his heart no doubt, as women can, without looking at him, and flushed, with a pleasure not devoid of triumph. It was something, after all, to have reigned thus without a rival, against hope itself. She talked on about all sorts of indifferent subjects,—her

house, her furniture, her engagements, the last French play, the first Italian Opera,—and Gerard, smoothing his hat vehemently (for all his wanderings had not eradicated this instinct of civilised life), began to feel more collected and rational, less as if he was swimming aimlessly to and fro some five fathoms under water without a hope of coming to the surface.

Presently he abandoned his hat, and edged his chair a little nearer the White Rose. "Do you know what brought me here to-day?" he asked, rather abruptly.

"Because you never came near me when I was in town last year," she answered, with a bright, mischievous smile, that took him back like magic to the lawn and the cedars at Marston Rectory. "I know more about you than you think. Why, I knew you were back before you had been a month in England!"

She stopped short and turned crimson, wishing she had not said so much.

"I only heard to-day of all your generosity," he continued, eagerly. "Don't think me ungrateful; don't think me unfeeling. I've never thanked you; I've never written to you. How could I last

summer? What excuse had I for coming near you? And yet I saw you once. I watched for you leaving a ball. I waited all night, and you came out at last. You dropped a flower. Mrs. Vandeleur, I have got it still!"

She had taken a screen from the chimney-piece; that fire scorched her cheeks so fiercely! Her face was hid, and she answered not a word; but he could see the handle shaking in her grasp, and it gave him courage to go on.

"I know everything now," he continued, "and you shall know everything too. I loved you, Mrs. Vandeleur, as you cannot have forgotten, when I was a raw, head-strong boy. I love you still (I may say so now you are free), being a worn and somewhat disheartened man. People will tell you such things are a romance, an impossibility. Mrs. Vandeleur, do you believe in them?"

He wanted to fix her. It was not so easy. She kept the screen to her face and murmured, "You have had plenty of time to forget me."

"But I couldn't forget you!" he exclaimed. "I never shall now. It is no use talking or thinking of what might have been. I loved you at nineteen, and I have loved you my whole

life. You only *liked* me, and—and—is it not the truth, Mrs. Vandeleur? — when somebody else came and asked you, I—I was discarded and put aside!"

She dropped the screen at last. She rose to her feet. She turned on him those wondrous eyes, and in their depths he read regret, reproach, forgiveness, and unalterable affection.

"Gerard!" was all she could find voice to say, but the tone was enough. It brought him to her side; his arm stole round her waist; her head rested on his shoulder; and so, with loving words and happy tears, the whole tale of perfidy, sorrow, estrangement, and eventual sacrifice, came to an end.

"And there is nothing between us now," she said, glancing at her own black garments, and wondering in her heart whether it was very wicked to feel so thankful she had become a widow.

"Nothing!" repeated Gerard, thinking only of Vandeleur's fate, and grimly deciding that, all things considered, it served him right.

"Except," continued Norah, and hesitated. She was going to add, "Except your own wife," but forbore to mention that tie, partly from motives of

delicacy, remembering to have heard of Mrs. Ainslie's elopement with a Frenchman; and partly because of a report that had reached her long ago, and to which she had given too ready credence, of that lady's death.

He observed her hesitation, and though he thought little of it at the time, remembered it afterwards.

It was strange that, during the whole of this interview, the idea of Fanny's existence should not once have crossed her husband's mind. He had, indeed, for years tacitly admitted the probability of her decease, and was more persuaded than ever that he was a widower, since she had not applied to him for assistance on his accession to wealth; but it was, nevertheless, somewhat rash to accept for a certainty the freedom that rested on such a problematical assumption as a wife's death, simply because she had given no notice she was alive. Gerard would doubtless have taken a more practical view of his own position, but that this long-lost happiness found again, this realisation of the dream which had for years been cherished but as a dream, was too much for his philosophy, and any little remnants of common-sense that might have helped

him, were completely scattered by the prospect of claiming the White Rose at last for his own, to wear her proudly and thankfully next his heart for life.

Time passes quickly in such interviews. He had been there more than an hour, and neither of them thought ten minutes had elapsed since his arrival. He would have stayed as long again, in all probability, but for a peal at the door-bell, announcing more visitors. Norah started, and stretched out her hand to wish him good-bye. When their hearts are gone, people generally lose their heads. With a hurried promise to meet again on the morrow, with a whispered blessing, and one long, clinging, passionate kiss, Gerard was down-stairs and in the hall as soon as the servant whose duty it was to answer the door.

On the steps stood a gentleman with a card-case in his hand. It was none other than Dandy Burton, who still entertained an ardent desire, founded chiefly on pique, to re-establish his former footing of friendship with Mrs. Vandeleur. He had not been aware till to-day that her servants were forbidden to admit him. He learned it now, when meeting a visitor face to face coming out, he was

told by the footman Mrs. Vandeleur was "not at home."

The Dandy ground a curse, deep, bitter, and unforgiving, between his teeth, but accosted Gerard with perfect good-humour and cordiality, like a man of the world as he was. The former fellow-pupils had already met more than once since Ainslie's accession to fortune, but though their acquaintance was renewed, all its boyish frankness and mutual good-will had died out. They did not like each other now, had scarcely an idea, certainly not a sentiment in common. Consequently, their "Good-bye" was more hearty than their "How-d'ye-do." To-day they walked arm-in-arm from Mrs. Vandeleur's door to the end of the street, and there parted with exceeding good-will. Both had much to occupy their thoughts. The Dandy, who could not fail to notice his companion's glistening eye, buoyant step, and general air of blissful pre-occupation, began to suspect how the land lay, and resolved forthwith to lose no time in shaping a spoke that should fit their wheel to a nicety! While Gerard, in all the engrossing ecstasies of a man who has just realised his ideas of Paradise, wanted no society but his own, certainly was least of all disposed for

that of one against whom his instincts warned him as an obstacle in his path.

Something told him that even if he wanted the power, the Dandy had all the will to become his rival.

CHAPTER III.

"LOST, STOLEN, OR STRAYED."

Most of us have some friend in the world on whom we think we are justified in inflicting our grievances, confidences, sorrows, and chiefly our scrapes. Out of the latter we expect him to pull us, though he should go in up to his neck on our behalf; and we generally favour him with a good deal of bad temper on our own account, and personal abuse, which we call "plain-speaking," if he venture to differ with us in opinion on the very subjects for which we demand his advice.

Such a friend was Dolly Egremont to many of his own intimates. To none more than Gerard Ainslie. The latter had not proceeded one hundred yards in the direction of Grosvenor Place ere conviction came full upon him, that Dolly, and nobody

but Dolly, must be collared and consulted forthwith.

I have said that the idea of Mrs. Ainslie's existence had in no wise tempered the first glow of happiness kindled by Gerard's interview with his old love, but such an immunity could not last long after the glamour of the White Rose's presence had passed away.

In the very middle of the first crossing he traversed, it came upon him like a flash, that unless he could positively certify Fanny's death; could go wooing, so to speak, with the very proofs in his hand, he was not only committing a crying sin by the woman he married, but—and in his eyes this was perhaps even a more serious consideration—inflicting a deadly injury on the woman he loved. Of course, she must be dead! He always reverted to that, I fear, with but little feeling of compunction or remorse, cherishing, like men in general, a persuasion that on them has been laid the whole weight of an unhappy marriage, that they alone are the sufferers, and that, although she never asked them, although they themselves must have taken the initiative, and at some stage of the proceedings must have walked into the pit with their eyes

open, the whole business is solely the woman's fault!

Gerard, then, felt chiefly anxious to prove the death of one whom heretofore he had so ill-advisedly vowed to love and to cherish.

It would be difficult, of course, to obtain information at such a distance of time, exceedingly inconvenient to institute inquiries which must be pursued abroad no less than at home. Even at so late a stage of the proceedings, every day that could be gained was in his favour. Dolly must be consulted forthwith. In a quarter of an hour Gerard was threading his way through the narrow streets about Leicester Square in search of the Accordion.

To find a theatre by daylight is almost as difficult as to follow a bridle-road in the dark. Gerard foolishly abandoned his cab, and was soon lost in a labyrinth of lanes and alleys, in which the staple commodities seemed to be gin, oysters, stale vegetables, penny ballads, second-hand furniture, and old clothes. Steadily pursuing his researches, I think he must have failed at last, but that he came into unexpected collision with Mr. Barrington Belgrave, who bounced out of a dirty doorway in a dead wall covered with hanging strips of tattered red-letter advertisements.

That gentleman's greeting was cold and haughty. Mr. Belgrave felt aggrieved that he should have seen less of the man whom he had befriended in distress since "Fortune," as he beautifully expressed it, "had showered her sunniest smiles upon her minion." The actor lifted his hat with stately politeness, and would have passed on, but that Gerard caught his hand, and held him by main force.

"You ought to know," said he, "if anybody does. I want to find the Accordion Theatre."

His manner was frank as usual. Mr. Belgrave, however, totally unmollified, replied with freezing dignity, "I certainly am not likely to forget the workshop where I make my daily bread. With some persons, nevertheless, memory on such matters is not to be trusted. Step in there, Mr. Ainslie. I wish you good-morning, sir."

So Ainslie stepped in, a little surprised at the dignity of his former friend, but attributing it in his ignorance to some part he was fresh from studying, and of which he could not at once shake off the tragic deportment and majestic air required.

He found himself in a dark passage, apparently leading nowhere, but hearing Dolly's voice, made for the sound. Opening a door by groping till he

found its handle, he entered a small uncomfortable room, with no carpet, fitted up like an office, save for a few such incongruous articles as buff-boots, stage jewellery, false hair, rouge-pots, and sham swords. Here he discovered Dolly and Mr. Bowles, with a cheque-book before them, and an expression on the countenance of either that denoted a summing-up of accounts in which expenditure had exceeded income.

"What, Gerard!" exclaimed Dolly, in as hearty a voice as ever, but looking more anxious than usual. "How did you find your way here? Not come about the play, have you?"

Gerard answered in the negative, and thought he detected a glance of congratulation exchanged by the two managers.

"Play!" said he, "hang the play. I'd forgotten all about it. I've got something of much more importance to talk to you about. We'll go back together, Dolly. If I'm not in the way I'll wait here till you are ready."

"I'm ready now," answered his friend, shuffling a lot of papers together and cramming them into a drawer. After a whispered dialogue with Mr. Bowles, in which were to be distinguished such words

as "exorbitant terms," "impatient public," "novelty," "attraction," and "New York," he took Gerard's arm, and sallied forth into the street.

"The fact is," said Dolly confidentially, and in accents of relief as they heard the stage-door of the Accordion clang to behind them, "we've got a speculation on hand now that will either be the best hit a manager ever made, or shut up our shop altogether. The consequence is I am never out of the theatre. To-morrow's a clear day, but it's the first I've had for a month. To me, indeed, my dear Jerry, I do assure you, 'All the world 's a stage, and all the men and women d—d bad players!' I never was so harassed in my life. Now we've got this American star coming over — this Madame Molinara — and she's to make all our fortunes. Such a beauty, they say; such an actress, and such a Tartar to deal with! If she don't draw twice as many people as the house will hold every night, we shan't pay our expenses,—I can see that already. Everything is to be found her, my boy; and her dressmaker's bill would swamp a life-boat. I was running up a few items just now when you came in, 'And I would that my tongue could utter the oaths that arose in me.' I've agreed, too, Jerry, that's the

worst of it. Given in to all her terms, and I dare not even think of them. Well, 'the stately ships go down,' you know, and perhaps hers may. I'm almost beast enough to wish she was at the bottom of the Atlantic, upon my soul!"

"I wish with all my heart she was!" answered Gerard laughing. "I want to talk to you about something else. I want you to help me. Dolly, you must stand by me like a brick. I'm going to be the happiest fellow in England."

Honest Dolly's face brightened at once. Whatever sorrows this gentleman cherished of his own, it was in his nature to put them aside when he could serve a friend, and of him La Rochefoucauld's aphorism was not true, "that there is something gratifying to every one in the misfortunes of his neighbours."

"I'm your man," said he. "Wicket-keeper, cover-point, slip, or long-stop,—you bowl the twisters, I'll do the fielding for you. Hang it, Jerry, when you and I get together, I feel as if we were boys again. I sometimes wish we were," he added, rather wistfully.

I believe that with old schoolfellows, even men of sixty go back into boyhood, and are capable, at

least in fancy, of "knuckling down" at marbles, "bolstering" in bed-rooms, robbing apple-trees, cribbing verses, and taking floggings with the fortitude of boyish bravado. Gerard Ainslie, bronzed and bearded, here in the streets of London, answered as he might have done when a smooth-faced boy in Mr. Archer's pupil-room.

"Don't jaw, Dolly. Hold on, and listen to me. You never were a sneak. You and I always went partners in everything, and have not failed each other yet. Will you see me through the great 'go-in' of my life, now?"

"Till all 's blue!" answered the other in the same vernacular; and then his friend, with many interruptions from basket-women, street-sweepers, loitering cabs, and thundering omnibuses, disclosed as a profound secret his attachment to the White Rose—an announcement that created no surprise whatever—and his intention to be married to her without delay, a determination that drew from Dolly a protracted and discouraging whistle.

"There is but one difficulty," insisted Gerard, waxing eager and eloquent as he warmed to the subject, "but one obstacle in my way, and that, you will say, is not easily surmounted. I cannot at

present obtain conclusive proofs of my wife's death. What makes me think she is dead? Why of course she must be. You don't suppose, Dolly, that woman would have left me alone if she had been above ground when I came into some money. If she's not dead, I could divorce her. Oh! nonsense, I know I could. Time has nothing to do with it. But there's no occasion for anything of the kind. I tell you she is dead. I am as sure of it as that you and I are opposite the Burlington Arcade at this moment. I must prove it, that's all. Prove it, and then, at last, Dolly, I shall win the prize I have been praying for all my life."

Before they parted it may easily be supposed that Dolly Egremont had pledged himself heart and hand to the assistance of his friend.

CHAPTER IV.

"OLD GRITS."

In pursuance then of the compact between this Damon and Pythias, Dolly started for the country by a very early train the following morning, it having been arranged that he should employ his one day of leisure in a journey to Ripley Mill, while Gerard took steps for following up the necessary inquiries in town.

It may not be out of place here to observe that Mr. Egremont was at this period in a fit state for any expedition involving expenditure of surplus energy, endurance of physical discomfort, or defiance of personal danger. He found himself in that abnormal mood which, according to their several characters, impels men to play high stakes at a gaming-table, to traverse the Rocky Mountains on

half-rations, or to cross the Atlantic in a yawl. Dolly felt sore and sick at heart, all the more so that the part of a disconsolate suitor was quite out of keeping with his frank manly nature and hopeful disposition. Nevertheless, truth to tell, he worried himself a good deal about Miss Tregunter, and his sorrow, which dated now some months back, rather increased than diminished with the lapse of time.

It is curious how differently people act under the different sentiments of friendship and love. If a man feels aggrieved by any imaginary neglect or unkindness from some tried comrade for whom he entertains a sincere regard, he asks simply for an explanation, and in three words their good understanding is re-established as firmly as ever; but with a woman, who is after all the more easily reconciled of the two, he adopts a diametrically opposite system. He usually commences with a levity of conduct and bitterness of speech intended to force on her the conviction that he has no value for her good opinion whatever; from this kind and considerate treatment he proceeds to a course of distant politeness and sulky withdrawal of his society, effectually shutting out from her every opportunity

of making amends or even asking what she has done to offend, and finishes perhaps by a series of false accusations, a storm of unjustifiable reproaches, through which she thinks herself fortunate if she can perceive the blue sky of forgiveness beyond.

Dolly Egremont had as yet only reached the second stage of this uncomfortable and intermittent malady. He was sulking with Jane Tregunter, was trying to persuade himself he did not care for her, never had cared for her, never would care for her, nor for any other woman in the world! He had a right, he thought, to feel aggrieved. This young lady had left town shortly after her refusal of Dandy Burton's offer, without vouchsafing to Dolly any notice of her intentions, or informing him of her destination. The fact is, Miss Tregunter, judging with more worldly wisdom than might have been expected from her character, was exceedingly jealous of her admirer's connection with the Accordion and its snares. She hated the very name of an actress, she almost hated Dolly himself for associating with that amusing and fascinating class. Burton, in his first and second parallels, before risking a final attack, had made no small use of this offensive engine in his plan of operations; especially had he

insisted on the dangerous charms of Madame Molinara, the American star, who was always coming, but never came; and this was the more unfair because Dolly, as we know, had not set eyes on the syren who, yet a thousand leagues off, could cause poor Janey such disquietude. Here, again, a personal interview of ten minutes, a frank explanation of as many words, would have set everything right. But that explanation was never granted, those words remained unspoken. Miss Tregunter took herself off to the Continent, and made no sign. It was a long and dreary winter to the manager of the Accordion. How many letters for Nice or Mentone he began and tore up unfinished to litter the waste-paper basket beneath his table, it is not for me to calculate. I believe that the counter-irritation produced by his correspondence with Madame Molinara did him a world of good. I believe if Miss Tregunter had remained abroad altogether he might eventually have attained a permanent cure. But, confound her! she came back. The *Morning Post* took good care to tell him she was in England, tracking her steps, however, with considerable delicacy, no farther inland than the Pavilion Hotel, Folkestone. And behold Dolly in perpetual fever

and discomfort once more! Would she write now? She might find a thousand excuses! Or should he? Perhaps she had forgotten him outright. Women, he had always heard, both on and off the stage, were exceedingly prone to forget. Six months was a long time—foreign travel a wondrous distraction. He thought, with some sinking of the heart, how many charming French marquises, Italian counts, Russian diplomatists, and Austrian officers, might have made themselves agreeable to the fresh English "Mees" while he was minding his rehearsals at the Accordion. What a fool he had been to care for her. It only made him wretched. Much better give it up! Yes, he would give it up, once for all, and devote himself entirely to the business he had taken in hand for his friend.

Dolly arrived at this sensible conclusion by the time he reached the railway station, to establish himself in a first-class carriage with a wrapper over his knees, and a number of the *Fortnightly Review*, which he did not even think of cutting, in his hand. Whirling into the soft spring landscape of the real country, he found the job not quite so easy as he expected. Jane Tregunter had somehow mixed herself up with the morning sky and the

budding hedges, the lambs frolicking in the meadow, the rooks flapping heavily off the new-turned plough. When he got out for breakfast at Shunter's Junction, the Hebe who made his tea, though it must be admitted no two people could be found more unlike, brought forcibly to his mind the woman he had resolved to think of no more. By the time he reached Ripley Station, two miles from Oakover, he had forgiven her from the bottom of his heart, only wished her well, and felt he would willingly give a whole season's profits of the Accordion just to see her once again.

Walking through the familiar lanes and footpaths about Oakover and Ripley, crossing the stiles he had jumped so often in his boyhood, scanning the orchards and meadows, all so little altered, save that their dimensions had unaccountably decreased, Dolly felt too surely that the old love contracted insensibly in boyhood had grown to be a part of himself, that to tear it away was to deprive him of the best and noblest in his nature, that for his own sake it was far better to cherish it pure and loyal, even though hopeless and unreturned, than harden to the selfishness of cynicism, or sink in the mire of reckless indulgence and dissipation. He

resolved, then, that he would at least continue her friend, that he would tell her so frankly and candidly the first time he had an opportunity, that he would rejoice in her happiness, and do all in his power to increase its stability, even though the edifice should be reared on the ruins of his own.

Then he shook himself free from the one ruling idea, raised his head, and walked on feeling, he knew not why, a happier and a better man. Following the well-remembered path to the Mill, and looking on the sluggish stream, the quiet fertile meadow, the orchard trees just coming into bud, he could hardly believe so many years had elapsed since he used to escape joyfully from Archer's pupil-room, and wander down here in the soft spring weather, just like to-day, for a glance at the trimmers, a pot of mild ale, and a chat with old Grits.

Was the miller alive? He had barely time to ask himself that question ere he saw the old man in person leaning an arm on the half-door of his bolting-room, scanning the meadows with a grim wrinkled frown just as he used to do all those years ago. It seemed as if he had never moved since Dolly saw him last.

"How do you do, Mr. Draper?" said the visitor, walking briskly up the garden-path between the fresh-dug beds. "I know you, but you don't know me."

Old Grits gave an ominous grunt. "Like enough," he answered, "and maybe I doesn't want to."

"Look again," replied Dolly, no whit disconcerted; "you had a better memory when I was here last. Come, Mr. Draper, now haven't you seen me before?"

The miller scanned him from head to foot, and Dolly could observe how the wrinkles had deepened under their thick coating of flour on the old man's face. His temper, too, seemed the rustier for age. After a prolonged stare he shook his head, observing scornfully, "There's a fresh crop of fools comes up every seed-time. One more or less makes small odds with spring drawing on."

Dolly laughed outright, and something in his laugh recalled him to the old man's recollection. Wiping his hand sedulously on his trousers ere he proffered it, the miller opened the half-door and bade his guest step in. "Your servant, sir—your servant," he repeated nervously. "I know you

now, I ask your pardon. You be one o' Mr. Archer's young gentlemen—the lusty 'un" (he had obviously forgotten his name). "Walk in, sir—walk in. I be proud to see you. I thought you'd a drawed down nigh a score more, though, when you'd growed to be a man."

This in a tone of mournful soliloquy, as of one disappointed, disheartened, but accepting such disillusions for the inevitable drawbacks of life.

"I'm glad to see you looking so hearty," said Dolly, cheerfully, while he seated himself in the well-known wooden chair, and filled a glass of the ale brought in by a red-cheeked, red-armed lass, as like the original Jane of careless memory as she could stare, which indeed she did to some purpose at the well-dressed visitor. "Here's your health, Mr. Draper, and long may you keep it. Why, you're not a day older than when we used all to come down here for an afternoon's fishing after study. Ah! how many years is that ago?"

Cunning Dolly was working round to his point. Old Draper's shaggy brows lowered, and his trembling hand jingled the ale-jug against the tip of his glass. "My service to you, sir," said he, setting it down after but a modest sip. "Ah! it's not

so many years, maybe, but there's been great changes, great changes, up at Oakover, and down here at Ripley, since you and me lifted the trimmer with the seven-pound Jack on, the night Mr. Vandeleur come by and took it home in his carriage. Yes, I remember of you now quite well, sir. Mr. Egremont, if I'm not mistaken. You was always a keen chap for the fishing; and now Squire's gone, and Madam, she do never come to the hall. And there's them missed from the Mill down here as used to—as used to—well, as used to come in and out, merry enough and bright enough to thaw an anchor-frost* on the mill-wheel. Ah, young master! if it's them as lives longest as learns most, it's them too as has most to forget. I do know as my memory's failing—I do sometimes wish he were gone for good and all."

Dolly looked round the room to avoid the old man's eyes, in which tears were rising fast. On a table near the window he observed a woman's straw hat, a watering-pot, and a pair of gardening-gloves. He almost started. Could it be possible that the

* Anchor-frost—a term peculiar to millers, signifying a degree of cold so intense as to clog with ice the mill-wheel below the water-surface. A metaphor apparently drawn from the idea that the river's bed is frozen so hard, it could not hold an anchor.

very person whose death he had come here to ascertain was alive and merry in the house?

Old Grits followed his visitor's glance. "Theer they be," said he huskily, "and theer they'll bide till she come in at that theer door, or till I be carried out on it. They be ready for ye, my pretty, never fear, them wot you was allus used to weer, and well they became ye—more's the pity! Ay, beauty's a snare maybe, but there wasn't such a one to look at not in a dozen parishes round. Look'ee here, Mr. Egremont—I mind your name now, sir—I've a been to their bow-meeting and what-not at Oakover, and see all the quality, ah! for twenty mile and more. If you'd taken and bolted of 'em nine times over, they'd never have looked more nor 'seconds' by the side of my Fan. Yes; you may come when you like, my pretty. It's all ready for you, and I got a new ribbon for your hat—was it last Ripley feast? I don't well mind; Lady-day comes round so often now, and never a blink of fair spring weather from year's end to year's end."

It seemed obvious to Dolly that her father at least believed Mrs. Ainslie was still alive, and he could pursue his inquiries therefore with less circumspection.

"I ought to have asked after my old friends when I sat down," said he; "I haven't forgotten any of them. Is it long, Mr. Draper, since you have heard from your daughter?"

"Daughter!" exclaimed the miller, in a voice that shook painfully, notwithstanding the pitch to which it was raised. "Who told you as I'd got a daughter? There were a little maid here long ago as used to play in and out o' that theer door, and hold on tight by Daddy's finger when us went to peep at the big wheel like on the sly. There were a likely lass, as I've been tellin' ye, what used to busk her gown and comb her long black hair in that there room behind you, and come out singing till the whole place turned as merry as a christening and as bright as a sunrise. The Lord's above all, and I've got two noble sons as lusty as yourself, Mr. Egremont, doing well in their business and honouring of their father. I ain't unthankful for it. But I've never had a daughter not since that day my Fan left me with a lie in her mouth, to go away with that slim chap as was a friend of yours, Mr. Egremont. You'll excuse me, sir; you was always a gentleman, you was, but don't let that chap and me ever come a-nigh. There'll

be blood between us, there will! Ah! she allus used to write afore he come and tuk her forrin. I'll never believe as she'd forsake me of her own free will, like this here. Ah, little Fan, little Fan! I'll not last long. Come back to me before I'm gone! It's all ready for you. Come back whenever you've a mind!"

The miller fairly broke down, and hid his face in his hands. Dolly endeavoured to console him in vain. It was obviously impossible to obtain any information from the hurt, heart-broken father, and after a few common-place expressions of sympathy and condolence, Dolly thought the greatest kindness he could do his host was to finish his beer and depart as promptly as he might.

CHAPTER V.

"THE LITTLE RED ROVER."

It was not much past noon when Mr. Egremont turned his back on the Mill, a good deal disappointed with the result of his researches, intending to retrace his steps to Ripley Station, and take the first train for London. Obviously Draper was in his dotage, and no clear intelligence could be gained from that quarter. He had observed, too, while the old man rambled on about his daughter, an expression on the maid-servant's face that seemed to denote contempt and impatience, as though her master's hallucination were unquestionable, and of such frequent recurrence as to become wearisome. Altogether, Dolly felt puzzled on his friend's account, and began to relapse into low spirits on his own. Notwithstanding the quiet promise of

the fresh spring day, life seemed darker than usual. Was it worth while to take so much trouble about matters which resolved themselves, after all, into the vaguest uncertainties? Everybody was fishing, but nobody ever seemed to catch anything. Reflecting on the habits and pursuits of his own acquaintances, he could not think of one who sat down in peace, contented with his lot. Dandy Burton considered himself a model philosopher of the modern school; but the Dandy, in spite of his training, could not conceal the habitual restlessness and anxiety in which he lived. Gerard Ainslie possessed everything in the world to make him happy, but here he was in hot water about Mrs. Vandeleur! The poor old man at the Mill had nearly gone out of his mind for lack of his daughter; and he himself, Dolly Egremont, one of the most popular fellows in London, manager of the Accordion Theatre, with health, strength, a good conscience, and a balance at his banker's, detected a cloud before the sun; because, forsooth, an ignorant young woman with a little red in her cheeks had of late betrayed her own want of common-sense in not appreciating him as he deserved. The malady from which this gentleman suffered has been com-

pared with some propriety to fever and ague. Walking through the meadows by the river-side, he felt the cold fit coming on. Doing violence to his loyalty, he began even to depreciate Miss Tregunter's exterior; and this is a very virulent form of shivers indeed. Was she so good-looking after all? Nay, even granting her attractions, what was beauty itself at the best?—a mere anatomical arrangement, a combination of certain tissues and properties, simply disgusting when analysed and taken in detail! Why should all the world be at sixes and sevens about these painted dolls, differing from a child's toy but in their powers of mischief? Were not women a mistake? Should we not do better without them?

He laid his hand on a stile and vaulted into a wide grass-grown lane with high hedges on either side, and a few cart-tracks cutting deep into the soft, elastic turf. In a twinkling—his eye was quick, or he would have missed it—in a twinkling, a small dark object, whisking out of the hedge twenty paces off, whisked back again, to steal along the bramble-covered ditch, and cross at an angle out of sight farther on.

Dolly stood transfixed. "By Jove, it's a fox,

and I've headed him!" he muttered below his breath; but his cynical reflections, his morbid misgivings of a moment back, were all scattered to the winds. His head went up, his eye brightened, his whole frame quivered with keen excitement, he felt as you feel when the first whip's cap is up at the far end of the covert, and although the soft warm air be moist and still, the gorse is waving and seething like a sea in a storm beneath your favourite horse's nose.

"That's a hunted fox," continued Dolly, when he had recovered his astonishment; "the hounds must be out to-day. I'll take my oath, by the way of him, he means business!"

Dolly was right; the hounds were out, and the "little red rover" had been holding his own gallantly for the last twenty minutes, mostly over grass. There were eighteen couple on his line, twelve of which were workers, and the remaining six had better have been left at home. It may be the "little red rover" possessed some intuitive knowledge of the fact. It was not the first time he had been hunted by a good many since the days of his cub-hood, when he used to catch field-mice, bouncing and gamboling like a kitten amongst the

secluded lawns and green shrubbery-walks at Oakover; therefore, when he woke this morning, bright, glossy, brown, and beautiful, to hear the loud crack of the warning hunting-whip, lest he should be chopped in covert, succeeded by the whimper of a puppy, the rate of a servant, and the attesting chorus of some twenty silvery tongues, he led his pursuers a gamesome dance round his stronghold, running his foil with considerable sagacity, till the peal of those vengeful voices subsided to a puzzled silence, when he made the best of his way straight across the adjacent meadows, with a quarter of a mile start, a gallant spirit under his fur coat, and a firm conviction that he could reach Belton Beeches, six miles off as the crow flies, before they caught him. The "little red rover" was but one, and his enemies, amongst whom, I presume, he included none of the horsemen, were legion; yet his heart, like his little body, was *multum in parvo,* tough, tameless, and as strong as brandy. "He's a straight-necked 'un, I know," observed the first whip, well back in the saddle for an awkward ragged bullfinch, when he had hallooed the hounds away and got them fairly settled to the line. "If he don't mean the old drain at Mark's Close, he'll

go straight to the Beeches. Forrard, Caroline! come up, horse!" The horse did come up, though with a scramble; Caroline, somewhat shy of thundering hoofs, scored forward to her sisters; and the keen ones, with the blood thrilling in their veins, made all the use of their horses they dared, feeling they were in for a run.

"The little red rover" came stealing on, nevertheless, through the silence of the wide rush-grown pastures. Sheep scattered out of his way with considerable activity, rallying and forming gallantly enough when their enemy had passed, and doing their best for his assistance by crowding in on his very track. Grave oxen looked at him wistfully out of their meek brown eyes, and turned to graze again, till they heard the pack behind, when, abandoning their usual dignity of deportment, they lowered their heads, kicked up their heels, blew smoke from their nostrils, stuck their ox-tails on end, and blundered about the fields as if they were mad. Countess and Caroline, Driver and Dairymaid, Mar-plot, Melody, Marigold, and the rest, hunting steadily on through all impediments, now spreading and flinging themselves with the sagacity of experience, now bustling together and

driving forward with the energy of instinct, came next in succession. After these the body of the pack—the parson of the parish, and a hard-riding cornet at home on leave; then the huntsman, the first whip, nearly a quorum of magistrates, and those hounds that had better have been left at home, followed by horsemen who cross the fields, horsemen who stick to the roads, the boy on a pony, the man in a gig, the gipsy with his donkey, and the labourer who, shouldering his spade, ran after the vanishing turmoil to have his hunt too, as far as the nearest hedge.

Of all these "the little red rover" was doing his best to make an example, and he met with less hindrance than might have been expected in his flight. Once, indeed, he found himself turned by a man at plough, and in the very next field to that agriculturist, ran almost into the jaws of a sheep-dog that had lost its master, and was sniffing round an out-house in disconsolate bewilderment. But the sheep-dog being young, "the little red rover" showed him such a sharp set of teeth, and so formidable a grin, as sent the poor frightened puppy scouring off at its utmost speed in a contrary direction; and, but for the steadiness of old Boun-

tiful, the dog, instead of the fox, would have been chased, and possibly run into, by her comrades, to the immortal disgrace of the pack.

It was hard on "the little red rover" to be headed by Dolly Egremont, when he had come two-thirds of the distance to his haven; but, although the sight of a human figure in this unfrequented lane turned him for a score of yards or so, he dauntlessly made his point after all.

Dolly stood, I say, for a moment like a man transfixed. He was drawing his breath to halloo, when the light unfrequent notes of hounds running hard reached his ear. Three or four white objects dashed into the lane where the fox had entered, followed by a rushing cataract of comrades, and the whole, throwing their tongues eagerly, swarmed through the opposite fence to check, as was but natural, in the field beyond.

"Hark back!" shouted Dolly, in the best dog-language he could muster, tearing gloves and clothes with frantic plunges to scramble through the fence.

"D——n ye! Hold your noise!" exclaimed a voice from the far side of the other hedge, followed by the excited huntsman himself, just escaping a

fall, as he landed in the lane, with his horse hard held.

"Your fox is back!" protested Dolly, breathless with exertion and enthusiasm.

"He's not! He's forrard!" replied the other, never taking his eye off his hounds. They had cast themselves nobly, and hit off the true line once more.

"*Let 'em alone!*" he added, in a voice of thunder, to one of the whips who was already across the lane, prepared to interfere, and ramming the spurs into his horse, without vouchsafing a glance at Dolly, scrambled over the fence to gallop on, with just one twang of his horn, that he couldn't have resisted to save his life.

The cornet, whose hat was stove in, and a hard-riding old gentleman who ought to have known better, followed in his wake. This succession of horses, already half-blown, made such a hole in the hedge as enabled Dolly to pass through. Though stout, he was no mean pedestrian; and on he ran at a splitting pace, keeping the hounds still in view, and intent only on seeing as much of the sport as he could.

Now the man who hunts on foot has at least one

advantage over him who hunts on horseback: the former can go so straight! A hog-backed stile and a foot-board, four feet odd of strong timber with a slippery take-off, are to him articles of positive refreshment and relief. Dolly found himself able to negotiate one or two such obstacles, when the boldest horsemen were compelled to make a circuit and find a gap. He ran on, accordingly, with great enjoyment to himself, for nearly half a mile, watching the decreasing pack as they fleeted like a flock of sea-gulls over the pastures, and the foremost riders, who had again overtaken and left him behind, dipping and bobbing at the fences, as if crossing a stiff country were the easiest pastime in the world. Most of the field, too, had now straggled by, affording him an opportunity of observing the caution with which the majority of mounted sportsmen follow their favourite amusement; and after making a fruitless snatch at a loose horse, that deprived him of the little breath he had left, a deep turnip-field reduced the pedestrian first to a walk, then to a stand-still.

In this field, for reasons which will presently appear, I am forced to admit Dolly's vested interest in "the little red rover" ceased and determined for

good and all; but the true sportsman, unless he be a master of hounds or huntsman, will not regret to learn that after a capital thing of five-and-forty minutes, this game old fox saved life and brush by entering the main-earth at Belton Beeches, just as the leading hounds crashed over the wattled fence that bounded the covert, and the hard-riding cornet, with his horse "done to a turn," entered the adjoining enclosure on his head. Let us hope that "the little red rover" may lead them many a merry dance yet ere he fulfils his destiny, and dies a glorious death in the open, under the soft November sky.

Dolly, with his hand to his side, and the perspiration rolling down his nose, was making his way to the gate, when the tramp of a horse coming up at a canter through the turnips caused him to hurry on, without looking back, that he might open it as speedily as possible for this belated equestrian. His hand was already on the latch, the horse's nose was at his shoulder, when a voice that made him start in his mud-encumbered shoes, observed softly,—

"Thank you, Mr. Egremont. It's impossible to catch them now. I think it's no use my going any further."

Dolly rubbed his eyes to be quite sure he was not

dreaming, giving his hot brow the benefit of the action, and looked up in the speaker's face.

"Miss Tregunter!" he exclaimed, in accents of the utmost confusion. "Why, I thought you were in Italy! What on earth are you doing here?"

"Why, haven't I as good right to be here as you?" answered the young lady, playfully. "Indeed, a better, if you come to that; for I believe this very field belongs to my uncle. Besides, I am out hunting, all in proper form, with a groom I can't find, and a horse I don't fancy. Ah! if I'd had Tomboy to-day they wouldn't have slipped away from me like this! though perhaps then I should not have seen you, and it is so long since we have met."

Something in the tone of her voice sank very pleasantly in his ear. Her eyes were softer, her colour deeper, her manner more gentle than her wont. For a moment he forgot his misgivings, his resolutions, all the estrangement of the last few months, basking, as it were, in the glow of her presence, in the delight of looking once again on the face he loved so well.

She saw she had lost nothing of her ascendency,

and, combined with her post of vantage in the saddle, this conviction, no doubt, gave her confidence to assume a levity she did not really feel.

"But how come you to be here?" she resumed; "and in such a ridiculous costume for hunting?—umbrella, shiny boots, tall hat, go-to-meeting coat, and no horse! You've not come back to poor old Archer as a private pupil, have you? Mr. Egremont, give an account of yourself. What brought you to this part of the country?"

"I came down to find old Draper," answered straightforward Dolly, not observing a shade cross her brow, for she expected he had made the journey to look after somebody else. "I've seen him this morning, and was on my way back to the station, when I fell in with the hounds. I little thought I should meet you after wondering where you were for nearly six months!"

There was something of reproach in his tone, and it smote her to the heart. She felt that, if he really cared for her, she had been acting unkindly by him, and deserved to lose him altogether. It would be very difficult, she said to herself, to give him up. They had now arrived in the high road. He stopped as if to wish her good-bye before he

took the direction of the railway station, and laid his hand on her horse's neck.

"I am going to London, Miss Tregunter," said he. "Shall I ever see you again?"

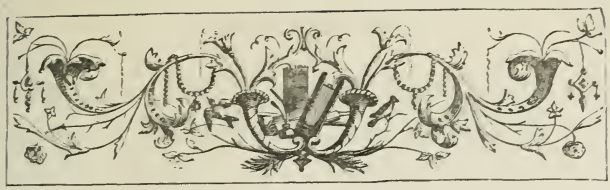
The Accordion, the actresses, the American star, all his offences of omission and commission, faded from her mind. If he parted with her now, here by the sign-post, without any further explanation, would he ever come back again? She trembled to think not. He, too, dreaded the farewell as conclusive. Neither knew the power each had over the other.

Looking straight into the horizon, far beyond Belton Beeches, where the chase was at this very moment coming to an end, Miss Tregunter observed, in a faint voice, and with anything but the cordiality of a hospitable invitation, "Are you obliged to go back by the two o'clock train? Hadn't you better come on to Aunt Emily's, and have some luncheon after your run?"

Aunt Emily's, where Miss Tregunter was staying, could not have been less than four miles as the crow flies from the sign-post under which they stood, and more than twice that distance from the only station at which the up-train stopped. A more inconvenient

arrangement for a traveller due in town the same evening can scarcely be imagined; nevertheless, this infatuated gentleman accepted the proposal with unconcealed delight, and in two seconds had turned his back on his destination, and was walking beside Miss Tregunter's horse with as light a step as if he had that moment emerged from bath and breakfast-room.

They must have found a good deal to say, for they talked incessantly, and a man breaking stones on the road observed the lady's head bent down once as if to whisper. This, I think, must have been at some important stage of the dialogue—perhaps when Dolly vowed to give up the Accordion Theatre, at the end of the present season, under certain conditions, which he urged with considerable warmth. It was a long four miles, I have already said, and over one of the worst roads in England. Yet when these wayfarers entered Aunt Emily's lodge-gates, I believe neither would have had the slightest objection to begin the homeward journey over again.



CHAPTER VI.

"IMMORTELLES."

But Dolly was not one who suffered his own happiness, however engrossing, to supplant the interests of his friend. Though feeling he had done "good business," as he called it, for himself in his trip down to Ripley, he also remembered he had in no way furthered those researches which were his primary object in leaving London. He had nothing to tell Gerard, except that old Draper seemed in complete ignorance of his daughter's fate. He racked his brain to think what engines he could set in motion for the discovery he wished to make, and in a moment of inspiration, while hailing a Hansom at the stage-door of the Accordion, it flashed across him that he had often heard extraordinary stories of the in-

genuity displayed by French detectives in such difficulties as his own. He wondered he never thought of them before. Mrs. Ainslie had left her husband when abroad; that at least he knew, though he had forborne asking Gerard any further particulars of her flight. She had probably eloped with a foreigner, and must have spent at least some part of her life on the Continent. Why, of course, the French detective police, with its wonderful organisation, its mysterious intelligence, its extensive ramifications, and the unscrupulous manner in which it brought all these resources to bear on a given object, was the power to which he should have applied from the first. He began to consider how he could best put himself in communication with this formidable institution. Thus meditating, he remembered making acquaintance, a few evenings before, with Monsieur le Comte Tourbillon, attached in some undefined capacity to the French Legation, and looking at his watch, directed his driver to start without delay for that stronghold of diplomatic ingenuity.

It is, I presume, an indisputable fact that nobody ever gets his primary object effected by visiting a legation of any description; and Dolly felt scarcely

dissatisfied—certainly not surprised—to learn from the politest of porters how Monsieur le Comte was absent from the Chancellerie at that instant, how he had not been there in the morning, and was not expected in the afternoon. He even thought himself fortunate in obtaining the Count's address over a perfumer's in Bond Street, and drove off once more on the track with a well-defined hope of running his quarry down in this sweet-smelling retreat.

By good luck the Count had not yet left home when Dolly arrived, and, with the politeness of his nation, broke out at once into profuse acknowledgments of Mr. Egremont's civility, accompanied by fervent protestations of assistance and good-will, when he learned that his visitor had already been to the Legation in search of him.

"What is it?" said the Frenchman, pushing forward a roomy arm-chair, and reaching down from the chimney-piece a deep box of cigarettes, without which sedatives it seemed impossible any conversation, involving interests of the slightest importance, could be carried on. "I speak in English, you know, *mon cher*. I think in English; I share your insular tastes and feelings; I

begin my dinner with champagne. I rode a *stipple-chase* last autumn at Baden-Baden,—yes, very well. I back the favourite; I drive my team; I shoot my gr-r-rouse! Figure to yourself that I am a veritable Briton—what you call true blue. Take one of these cigarettes; they are of all that is finest in tobacco. And now say, then, what can I do for you?"

Dolly lit his cigarette, and observed thoughtfully between the whiffs,—

"Your detective police, Count, is, I fancy, the best in Europe."

The Count laid his finger to his nose as only a Frenchman can, while he replied dictatorially,—

"For repression? No! For retribution—for *finesse*—for perseverance—for eventual discovery? Yes—a hundred times 'yes!' You remember that murder in the Rue Castiglione, and the number of suspected persons involved? An apple-woman, a pensioner, a convict who had fulfilled his sentence, a Swiss governess, an English butler, the cripple who lived on the third-floor, a hospital nurse, the night porter, and a child ten years of age. It is true none of these were convicted, but our police arrested them all! You have not forgotten the

robbery of diamonds in open day from the shop of one Louvet, opposite the gardens of the Tuileries? One brigand wedged the door, whilst his accomplice broke the window, and carried off a *parure* valued at eighty thousand francs. The shopman saw the man, the sentry at the garden-gate saw the man, six bystanders deposed on oath that they could identify the man, and pointed out the very house in which he took refuge. Well, our police hunted and hunted, like bloodhounds, till they ran him down at last; but it was unfortunately in the Morgue, and I fear nobody ever knew what became of the diamonds. Then there was that atrocious and daring murder committed by the man in the *blouse*, close to the Barrière de l'Etoile, in presence of a hundred witnesses. The assassin walked up to an old gentleman who was a creditor for a sum of fifteen hundred francs, and shot him deliberately in the bosom with a pistol, which is at this moment in the hands of our police. Less than an hour elapsed ere they were on his track. They arrested his mistress, his *blanchisseuse*, the boy who blacked his boots. They took possession of his furniture, clothing, and effects; they traced him from Paris to Versailles, from Versailles back to Paris, thence

to Chalons-sur-Marne, Strasbourg, and across the Rhine into Prussia. Back through Belgium to France, they were very close on him at the frontier, and a man answering his description in many particulars was taken, descending from the *coupé* of a first-class carriage, at Lille. Oh, they searched, *par exemple*, searched everywhere, I can tell you, my friend."

The Count's cigarette was done. He paused in deep meditation.

"And they found him?" exclaimed Dolly, interested in spite of himself in so long a chase.

The Count stretched out his hand for a fresh cigarette, while he answered thoughtfully, in his own language,—

"*On ne l'a pas trouvé, mais on le cherche toujours!*"

Emboldened by so successful an issue, Dolly now begged the Count's good offices in obtaining the valuable assistance of this detective police for the object he had in view.

"*Comment? Vous désirez donc constater la mort de quelqu'un,*" said the Count; "*ça marche tout seul!* Nothing can be more simple. Is it indiscreet to ask particulars?"

"Not the least," answered Dolly. "I have a friend who made an unhappy marriage."

"That is very possible," observed the Count in parenthesis.

"This friend," continued Dolly, "has for many years lost sight of his wife. In fact, she—she ran away from him. He has every reason to believe she is dead, but has no evidence of the fact. At present he is particularly anxious to obtain positive proof."

"Precisely," answered the Count; "he wants to make another unhappy marriage. I perceive——"

Dolly smiled. "I hope they are not all unhappy," replied he, thinking of a certain walk by a lady on horseback not long ago. "But in the meantime, Count, we are most desirous of finding out whether or not my friend's has been dissolved by death. The lady eloped with a countryman of yours, more than ten years ago, at Homburg or Baden-Baden."

The Count started.

"*Une Anglaise!*" he exclaimed eagerly. "*Aux yeux bruns, aux cheveux noirs. Très belle! Très vive! La taille un peu forte! Pardon, mon cher.* Your story interests me, that is all."

Dolly stared. "You seem to know her," said he. "And yet where you can ever have met Fanny Draper, I own, puzzles me not a little."

"Fanni!" answered the Count. "*C'est ça!* Fanchon; at least, I always called her Fanchon. My friend, you came to describe a person to me; I will save you the trouble. Listen, I am going to tell you. Stop me if I am wrong. Fanchon was a brunette, very handsome for an Englishwoman. Pardon: that, you know, must mean very handsome indeed. She had dark eyes, white teeth, and a high colour. She dressed her black hair in masses low down her neck, and generally wore heavy gold earrings. She spoke French badly—very badly; English with a tone, seductive enough, of your charming *patois*. She was rude to her husband, who looked younger than herself, and she had run away with him. Am I right?"

Dolly, whose eyes were getting rounder and rounder in sheer amazement, could but nod assent. The Count proceeded in a tone of satisfaction, such as that with which a man works some beautiful problem in mathematics to a demonstration.

"They lived in a small and modest apartment opposite the Kursaal when at Homburg, and the

husband played heavily—heavily, that is, for him. He was a poor man, but his manners were better than his wife's. They lived irregularly—what we call in England, we others, 'from hand to mouth.' They were not happy in their *ménage*. *Tiens*, my friend! You need not trust to our detective police. I can give you all the information you require. This couple were in Paris in the spring of—*voyons*—the spring of 18—. From Paris they went to Baden, from Baden to Homburg, and at Homburg the wife left her husband with a French nobleman. Would you like to know their name? Behold, I am not yet exhausted. It was Enslee, Enslee: is it not so? Say, then, am I right? Have I been telling you a true story or a fable?"

"How did you learn all this?" gasped Dolly, in the plenitude of his astonishment.

The Count threw the end of his cigarette into the fire-place.

"*C'est tout simple!*" said he, composedly. "*Parbleu, c'est moi qui l'à enlevée!*"

The authority was unquestionable, but the situation a little puzzling. Dolly's first feeling was the truly Anglican instinct which bade him consider this man the mortal enemy of his friend; his second, a more

cosmopolitan reflection that the Frenchman had really conferred on Gerard Ainslie a very important service. Altogether, he deemed it wise to make the best of his position, and emulate the other's coolness.

"And what became of her?" asked Dolly, in as indifferent a tone as if he had been talking about a cat or a canary.

To increase his amazement, the Count's eyes filled with tears.

"She died," he answered, in a voice broken by emotion. "Pity me, my friend; she died, and I—I was not with her to arrest her last look, to catch her last sigh. This it is that excites my regret, my remorse. 'Tis true that she had left me—left me as she left her husband. The only difference was that she did not care for him, while to me she was devoted—yes, devoted! Many women have been in the same plight, I imagine, Egremont, but none I think more so than my poor Fanchon. Even at this distance of time I can recall the graceful *pose* in which she would stand at her window watching for my return, with her showers of light brown hair—Stay! No; that could not be Madame Enslee—I am confusing her with some of the others. Pardon,

my dear Egremont, these *souvenirs* of the heart are apt to distract a man in the head, and I have always been of an affectionate temperament, that is why I suffer. Oh! I have suffered, I tell you, not only in this instance. Enough—to business. My most sacred feelings shall be repressed in the cause of my friend. You wish to *constater* the death of this Madame Enslee? Is it not so?"

"I do indeed," answered Dolly, beginning, as he hoped, to see daylight on Gerard's behalf. "She died, you say. When? where? Are you sure of this? How do you know?"

"I have seen her tomb!" answered the Count, rising to his feet, and standing erect in the attitude of one who pronounces a funeral oration. "With trembling steps, with weeping eyes, handkerchief in hand, I visited the cemetery in which her sacred ashes repose. She lies at Brussels, my friend. From my diplomatic station here, in your great country, I look towards La Belgique, and my eyes fill with scalding tears, for I shall never see my sweet Fanchon again. Pardon my emotion, monsieur. You are a man of heart, a man of courage; you will not despise my weakness. I dined at the Hôtel de Flandre; I walked out in the peaceful sunset; I

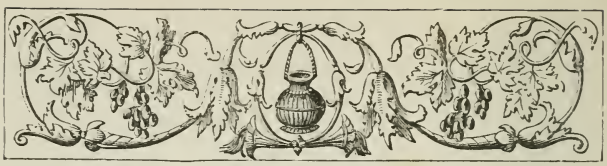
traversed the cemetery; I hung *immortelles* on my Fanchon's tomb; there were flowers growing round it, the walks were swept, and the grass new-mown. I recognised the attention of my friend, Prince Dolgoroukoff: he also was *homme de cœur*. We travelled back to Paris together, and mingled our regrets. I am a philosopher. *Quoi!* But philosophy can only dominate, she cannot destroy. Are you satisfied, Mr. Egremont? Bah! Let us talk of other affairs. Let us dissipate these sombre memories. I go to make a little tour in the park. Do me the honour to accompany me. You excuse yourself; you have not time! It is my loss. *Permettez, adieu, monsieur; ou plutôt, au revoir!*"

So Dolly took his departure, puzzled not a little by the extraordinary confusion of feelings to which he had lately been a witness. His uninitiated palate revolted from this *salmi* of remorseful memories, habitual libertinism, and shameless depravity, spiced with a seasoning of false sentiment. Nevertheless, he felt he had so far obtained good news for Gerard, and went on his way rejoicing.

It would have damped his satisfaction considerably could he have witnessed the cloud of uncertainty that overspread his informant's countenance as the

latter paused on the threshold of his apartment, gloved, hatted, and equipped for a walk.

"*Tiens!*" said the Count, putting his hand to his forehead, and trying hard to unravel the entanglement of memories it contained. "Have I deceived myself after all? Was it the English Fanchon whose grave I watered with my tears at Brussels, or that tall girl from Innspruck, or the Alsatian *blonde?* How stupid I am! Fanchon! Fanchon! It is a vile habit of mine to call every woman with whom I have relations by that endearing name. It is convenient at first, no doubt; but see what confusion it makes in the end. *N'importe!* Fanchon, or Finette, or Fleur-de-lis, or Feu-follet, it makes little difference; the *immortelles* would have been withered by this time, all the same!"



CHAPTER VII.

"SURGIT AMARI."

Gerard Ainslie sat at breakfast in his cheerful room overlooking the park, with a bright spring sunshine pouring in on his white tablecloth, and the balmy air stealing through his open window to stir the broad sheet of his morning paper, propped against the coffee-pot. There was a tender quiver of green leaves, a fragrance of opening buds and bursting vegetation, pervading the world outside; and within, for Gerard at least, late in life as it had come, the veritable spring-tide of the heart.

He was happy, this bright morning, so happy! A kindly, well-worded letter from Dolly, detailing the interview with Count Tourbillon, had been brought by his servant when he woke, and it seemed like the announcement of freedom to a pri-

soner for life. True, he had given more than one gentle thought to the memory of the woman who had loved him so recklessly, deceived him so cruelly; but all sadder emotion was speedily swallowed up in the joyous reflection that now at last he might stretch his hand out for the White Rose, and take her home to his breast for evermore. What a world this seemed suddenly to have become! How full of life and beauty everything had grown in the space of an hour! He could scarcely believe in the listlessness of yesterday, or realise the dull weight of sorrow he had carried for so many years that he was accustomed to its pressure, and only knew how grievous it had been now, when it was shaken off. He sat back in his arm-chair, absorbed in dreams of happiness. He felt so good, so considerate, so kindly, so thankful. How delightful, he thought, thus to be at peace with self, in favour with fortune, and in charity with all men!

His servant threw open the door and announced "Mr. Burton."

I suppose, since the fall of our first parents, there never was a Garden of Eden yet into which a serpent of some sort did not succeed in writhing himself soon or late—never a rose in which, if you

did but examine closely, you might not find an insect, possibly an earwig, at the core.

Gerard, cheerfully and hospitably greeting his early visitor, little suspected how that gentleman was about to combine the amiable qualities of insect and reptile in his own person.

"Breakfasted?" replied the Dandy, in answer to his host's inquiry. "Hours ago! Been round the park since that, and half-way to Kensington. Fact is, my good fellow, I'm restless, I'm anxious, I'm troubled in my mind, and it's about you!"

"About me!" said the other. "Don't distress yourself about me, Dandy. I've had a roughish time of it, as you know, but I'm in smooth water at last. If you won't eat, I'll have the things taken away."

While a servant was in the room, Burton preserved an admirable composure, enlarging pleasantly enough on those engrossing topics which make up the staple of everyday conversation. He touched on the political crisis, the new remedy for gout, the Two Thousand, the Derby, the Jockey Club, the Accordion, and the American actress of whom everybody was talking; while Gerard listened with a vague, happy smile, not attending to a syllable,

as he pictured to himself the White Rose moving gracefully through her morning-room, amongst her flowers, and wondered how early he could call without exciting remarks from the household, or outraging the decencies of society.

The moment the door closed, Burton's face assumed an expression of deep and friendly concern.

"Jerry," said he, "I didn't come here at early dawn to tell you what 'the Man in the Street' says. I've got something very particular to talk to you about. Only—honour!—it must go no farther than ourselves."

Since they left Archer's, years ago, he had not called Ainslie by the familiar boyish nickname. The latter responded at once.

"Out with it, old fellow! Is it anything I can do for you?"

Burton became perfectly saint-like in his candour.

"You will be offended with me, I know," said he. "But a man ought not to shrink from doing his duty by his friend even at the risk of quarrelling with him. You and I are not mere acquaintances. If you saw me riding at a fence where you knew there was a gravel-pit on the other side, wouldn't you holloa to stop me?"

Gerard conceded that he certainly would bid him "hold hard," marvelling to what this touching metaphor tended the while.

"Jerry," continued his friend, with exceeding frankness; "I have reason to believe you are going to ride at a very blind place indeed. You shan't come to grief if I can help it!"

Ainslie laughed good-humouredly. "Show us the gravel-pit," said he. "I don't want to break my neck just yet, I can tell you."

"You won't like it," answered the other. "It's about Mrs. Vandeleur."

Gerard rose and took two turns through the room. Then he stopped opposite Burton's chair, and asked stiffly, almost fiercely,—"What about Mrs. Vandeleur? Mind, I have known that lady a good many years. No man alive, not the oldest friend I have, shall say anything disrespectful of her in my presence."

The Dandy began to think he didn't quite like his job, but he had resolved to go through with it.

"You make my task very difficult," said he; "and yet you must know, it is only in your interest I speak at all. Sit down, Ainslie, and let me

assure you that the subject cannot be more painful to you than it is to me."

Gerard sat down, took a paper-cutter from the writing-table, and began tapping it irritably against his teeth, while Burton watched him with about as much compunction as he might have felt for an oyster.

He had no particular grudge against his old fellow-pupil, entertained no rabid sentiment of jealousy that the woman who had dismissed him so unceremoniously should be too favourably inclined towards the returned gold-digger,—but it was only through Gerard, as he believed, that he could crush the White Rose to the earth. Men have such different ways of showing their attachment. The kindly, gallant spirit, the man of a really brave heart, can continue loyal even under defeat, can sacrifice his own happiness ungrudgingly to her whom he loves better than self, and while writhing in the acutest sufferings, can obey the first instinct of pluck, and say, "I am not hurt." But the cur, howling under punishment, turns fiercely on the once caressing hand, tears and worries at the heart it cannot make its own, cruel as cowardly, seeks or creates a hundred opportunities to inflict the pain it feels.

Burton hated Mrs. Vandeleur with a hatred that sprang from pique, disappointment, and a sense of conscious unworthiness discovered by one whom he had hoped to deceive. Therefore, he determined to be revenged. Therefore, he swore, in his own idiom, "to spoil her little game." Therefore, he stuck at no baseness, however unmanly, to detach her from the one person in the world who could have made her happy.

But effectually to work out his plans, it was necessary to be on good terms with the enemy. He had written many notes, wearied a score of common friends, and submitted to much humiliation with this object. Now he began to see the fruit ripening he had been at such charges to bring to maturity.

"It is not yet too late," said he, standing on the hearth-rug and gesticulating impressively with his umbrella, "for what I have to tell you. Had she been your wife, of course I must have held my tongue. Ainslie, the world says you are going to marry Mrs. Vandeleur. I don't ask you whether this is true; but you and I were boys together, and there is something you ought to know, which shall not be withheld by any foolish scruples of mine."

Gerard felt his very lips shake. There was more at stake here than wealth, honour, life, but he steadied himself bravely, and bade the other "go on."

"You have cared for this woman a great many years, I fancy," continued Burton, in grave, sympathising tones. "Believe me, from my soul I feel for you. But it is better you should be undeceived now than hereafter. Hang it! old fellow," he added, brightening up, "they're all so, you may depend upon it. There never was one born worth breaking your heart about."

With dry lips Gerard only answered, "You have told me nothing yet. Speak out, man. I'm not a child."

"She has made love to a great many fellows besides you, Jerry," said the Dandy. "Mind, I'm too old a bird to credit half or a quarter of the scandal I hear, but, at the same time, I cannot shut my eyes to what I see. Ask any man in London if you don't believe me. You've not been in the world so much as I have; and besides, you're such a fierce, game sort of chap, people would be shy of telling you anything they thought you didn't like. It is only a true friend who dare

take such liberties. I don't want to hurt your feelings. I don't want to blacken anybody's character; but, Jerry, indeed this lady is not fit to be your wife. You wouldn't like to marry a woman that's been talked about."

The paper-cutter broke short off in Ainslie's grasp. "Blacken! Talked about!" he exclaimed furiously; then, checking himself, added in a calmer tone, "I believe you mean kindly, Burton, but you have proved nothing even now."

The latter opened his pocket-book, took from it three or four folded papers, smoothed them out methodically on the table, and observed,—

"I suppose you know Mrs. Vandeleur's handwriting. Look at those?"

They were receipts of recent date for large sums of money paid, as it would seem, by Burton to Mrs. Vandeleur's account, and represented, indeed, the withdrawal of certain investments he had made, during their pecuniary confederacy, on her behalf.

Gerard opened his eyes wide, as also his mouth, but common-sense had not yet quite deserted him, and he pushed the papers back, observing,—

"I don't see what these have to do with the question. They refer, apparently, to some matter of

business between—between Mrs. Vandeleur" (he got the name out with difficulty) "and yourself. It may or may not be a breach of confidence to show them, but—" (and here he hesitated again)—"but I don't suppose a man takes a receipt from a woman he cares for!"

"Confound the gold-digger!" thought Burton; "where did he get his knowledge of life?" He turned a franker face than ever on his friend, and searched once more in the pocket-book.

"You talk of breach of confidence," said he. "I am the last person in the world to betray a trust. But see the corner in which I am placed. Am I to keep faith with a woman to the destruction of my friend? Jerry, you are a man of honour. What would you do in my case?"

"I cannot advise you," answered the other in a faint voice, "and I cannot understand you. There seems to be something more to say. Let us get it over at once."

He could not have endured his torture much longer. He was ready now for the *coup de grace*.

From an inner flap of the pocket-book Burton produced a note in a lady's handwriting, and tossed it to his friend. It had no envelope nor address,

but there were Norah's free, bold characters; there was Norah's monogram. The very paper was peculiar to Norah, and the scent she had used from childhood seemed to cling faintly about its folds. Gerard was steady enough now, and nerved himself to read every word bravely, as he would have read his death-warrant.

It was the note Mrs. Vandeleur had written long ago to Jane Tregunter, about a fancy ball, and which Burton had abstracted from her writing-table. Every endearing term, every playful allusion, would equally have suited the hurried lines a lonely woman might send to the man she loved. The tears almost rose to his eyes while he thought what he would have given for such a production addressed to himself, but that was all over now. It had lasted for—how many years? Never mind. It was all over now. He folded the note carefully in its former creases, and returned it to Burton, observing, very gravely,—

"You ought never to have shown such a letter as that to a living soul."

"You are the last man who should reproach me," retorted the Dandy, affecting to be much hurt, and feeling, indeed—such is the power of deception in

the human mind—that his friend was not using him so well as he deserved! "Perhaps I might have valued it more had I not known the writer's character so well. It would have been the worse for you. Good-bye, Gerard. I never expected your gratitude, and I came here prepared to lose your friendship, but I don't care. I have done my duty, and some day you will confess you have judged me unfairly."

So the Dandy walked out with all the honours of injured innocence, and Gerard sat him down, with his head bowed in his hands, numbed and stupefied, wondering vaguely how such things could be.

Never before, in any of his adventures, at any stage of his wanderings—in the crisis of danger, or the depth of privation—had he felt so utterly lost and desolate. Hitherto there had been at least a memory to console him. Now, even the Past was rubbed out, and with it everything was gone too. There was no hope left in life—no comfort to cheer—no prize to strive for—no guerdon to gain. The promise had vanished from the future—the colour had faded out of nature—there was no more magic in the distance—no more warmth in the sunshine—no more glory in the day.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HE COMETH NOT."

Man, having the gift of reason, shows himself, where his affections are involved, perhaps the most unreasonable of living creatures. Corydon, offended with Phyllis, becomes, as far as she is concerned, a mere drivelling idiot, and a sulky one into the bargain. He may feed his bullocks, shear his sheep, plough his furrows, and thresh his wheat, with as much judgment as before their rupture, but nothing will persuade him to bring that good sense which he carries about over the farm, to bear on the reconciliation he desires. If he didn't plant them carefully in drills, would he expect huge turnips to rain from heaven into his ox-troughs? Wherefore, then, should he stand with his hands in his pockets whistling a tune at the other end of the parish,

when the object really next his heart is to carry the vixen off with him in a tax-cart to the Fair? There is a certain element of self-conceit in the male animal, that he calls proper pride, forbidding him to tender the first advances, or even to meet his rustic beauty half way, and the result of such egotistical stupidity is deep sorrow to her, much vexation to himself, possibly a continued rupture that leads to the eventual unhappiness of both. One tender word, even one kind look, in time, might have saved it all.

Men deal hard measure to those they love. The better they love them, the harder the measure. Perhaps there is no injustice more cruel than to make a woman answerable for the slanders of which she is the innocent and unconscious object, nay, of which, in some cases, the man who visits on her his own vexation is the original cause. She has been imprudent, it may be, for *his* sake. The world is not slow in discovering such follies, nor averse to exposing them; but it is hard that he for whom the risk was ventured should be the one to exact the penalty, that he, whose very hand has soiled the flower, should, therefore, leave it to droop and wither in the shade.

Gerard Ainslie, with a kindly nature and some-

what too sensitive a heart, had not one whit more of forbearance, not one grain more of good sense, than his neighbours. "Mrs. Vandeleur had been talked about—talked about!" This was what he kept on repeating to himself till he had chafed and irritated the wound to a festering sore; the pure and gentle spirit he had elevated into an ideal of womanly perfection was, then, a mere creature of common clay like the rest. His idol, that he thought so far above him, had been dragged through the mire like other men's. His love was no longer spotless—there were stains on the petals of the White Rose! With masculine inconsistency, during those long years of sorrow and separation he had never been jealous of her husband like this! Talked about! Very likely they were laughing over his infatuation and sneering her fair fame away, at that very moment, in the clubs. Talked about! Perhaps even now some coxcomb was sitting by her in the well-known drawing-room, looking with bold insulting stare into those eyes of which his own could scarce sustain the lustre, plying her with the jargon of empty gallantry, nay, even making love to her, not unwelcome, in serious earnest!

And this was the woman so associated with the

holiest and best part of his nature, that to him the very hem of her garment had been a sacred thing, yet all the while she must have been a pastime for half the men in London! A practised flirt; a mere faded coquette. Experienced, notorious, fast—good fun—and, talked about!

He walked up and down the room till he felt half mad. He made a thousand resolutions, and dismissed them all as soon as formed. He would order his hack, ride off to her at once, and overwhelm her with reproaches. He would never enter her house, nor speak to her, nor even set eyes on her again. He would rush into society, and throw himself everywhere in her path, to cut her to the heart by the good-humoured condescension of his greeting, the placid indifference of his manner. He would leave England for ever, and go where there was nothing to remind him of the hateful bewitching presence, the dear accursed face! It rose on him, even while he thus resolved, in its pale thoughtful beauty, with the sweet sad smile, the deep, fond, haunting eyes, and then, I think, he tasted the very bitterest drop in the cup he had to drain.

These sorrows are none the less grievous while they last, because they are sickly, unreal, shadowy,

sentimental. Gerard Ainslie was very miserable indeed, enduring just as much torture as he could bear, and all because a man, in whose honesty he placed little confidence, of whose intellect he entertained but a mean opinion, had told him the woman he loved was talked about!

Nevertheless, the only one of his resolutions to which he did adhere was the unwise determination to avoid Mrs. Vandeleur. He refused sundry invitations, threw over several engagements, and kept out of her way with studious persistency, till he made her almost as wretched as himself.

The White Rose began by wondering why he did not come to see her, as was, indeed, natural enough, when she recalled the tenour of their last few interviews. He must have been summoned out of town, she thought, on sudden business, perhaps connected with herself, and this agreeable supposition caused her to wait with more patience than might have been expected; but when day after day passed by, and she kept her carriage standing at the door, in the vain hope that he might call before she went out, when hourly posts came in, and scores of notes in various shapes were delivered by footmen, commissioners, and messengers of every description, yet

none arrived bearing a superscription in Gerard's handwriting, she began to feel nervous, depressed, and sick at heart.

Then she took to going out of an evening to such balls, dinners, or other gatherings as she thought it possible he might attend, and found herself, as usual, a welcome guest. The smartest ladies in London considered Mrs. Vandeleur an additional ornament to the best filled drawing-room; and amongst whole packs of cards ranged round the glass over her chimney-piece, she had only to select the invitations that pleased her best. She drove wearily round, therefore, from one to another of these crowded festivities, and each seemed more tiresome than its predecessor, because amongst all those vapid hundreds the only face she cared to look on escaped her still.

It is dreary work to assist at such amusements when the mind is ill at ease, the heart far away. Keenly and bitterly the happiness of others brings before us our own sorrow; and the very qualities of person and bearing we most admire only remind us the more painfully of our own loved and lost, who would have shone so brightly here. The memory of the head is the most precious ingredient of

human intellect, but surely it is wise to crush and stifle the memory of the heart.

Mrs. Vandeleur thought more than once of consulting her staunch friend Dolly Egremont, but was deterred from this step by a variety of motives, amongst which that gentleman's continual employment at his theatre, and intense pre-occupation about Miss Tregunter, were not the least urgent. She entertained, besides, the instinctive delicacy that scares a woman from the subject dearest to her, despite the relief she feels it would be to share her burden with another. Had she met him in society it is probable that her reserve would have given way, and all her sorrows been poured freely out, but Dolly Egremont found no time now for such frivolities as dinner-parties, dances, or concerts. Every moment he could spare from the Accordion was devoted to reconciling his lady-love to its exigencies, soothing her jealousy of the American actress lately arrived, and choosing costly articles for domestic use, shortly to become the property of both.

So, after a deal of hesitation, and a certain petulant conviction that she could bear suspense no longer, Mrs. Vandeleur sat down to her writing-

table, determined to hazard one frank, honest, and final appeal to her unaccountable lover, by letter. How should she begin? She couldn't call him her "darling Gerard." It seemed so cold and formal to address him as "Dear Mr. Ainslie." She plunged into her task at once with a long line that reached right across the page.

"What has happened? How have I offended you? Why have you never been near me? Nay, why have you systematically avoided me almost since the day (it seems now to be years ago) that, I am not ashamed to confess, made me the happiest woman in London? I need not go into the past. Heaven knows you cannot have reproached me as I have reproached myself. Whatever sorrows I may have to endure I deserve richly, and at your hands. Perhaps this is why I am so humble now. Perhaps this is why I am prompted to write you a letter that you will condemn as forward, unwomanly, uncalled for. I cannot help it. I seem to have grown so reckless of late. Since I was quite a girl everything has gone against me, and I think I have nothing on earth to care for now. There are some things people can never forget. Oh, how I wish

they could! There were a few months of my life, long ago—don't you remember them, Gerard?—in which I was really happy. How quickly they passed away, and yet I have no right to repine, for I have lived that dear time over and over again, so often since! If I were to tell you that my feelings have never altered since I was Norah Welby, keeping house for poor papa, at Marston, you would not believe me, how could you? and you would have a right to despise me for the avowal. I don't deserve to be believed. I do deserve to be despised. I have been so vile, so heartless, so false, and oh, so foolish! No punishment that I suffer can be greater than I ought to expect. And yet, Gerard, I am so very miserable. I blame nobody. I am sure I have behaved wickedly by you, and it is quite right I should be the sufferer, but can we not be friends? Dear old friends, that's all. I have not too many, I assure you, and I prize the few I possess as they deserve. You need not shun me as if you hated my very sight. You were not at Lady Billesdon's last night, nor Mrs. Fulljam's the night before, nor at the Opera; and there was somebody I took for *you* in the stalls at the French play, but when he turned round it was a horrid man with

an eye-glass. I was so disappointed I could have cried.

"Gerard, I am used to disappointments now, though I don't think practice makes me bear them one bit better. Do not give me another when I entreat you to let us meet once more; not here—I will never ask you to come here again, but anywhere, anywhere, in society—in the world: I only want to shake hands with you and know that I am forgiven. You will then feel that I am still, as always,

"Your sincere friend,

"Norah Vandeleur."

This rather incoherent production the White Rose sealed and stamped with exceeding care, hiding it thereafter within the folds of her dress somewhere beneath her chin, and resolving, for greater security, to drop it in a pillar-post box with her own hands, though why the ordinary means of transmission should not have served her on the present occasion I am at a loss to explain. I think I can understand the reason she ordered her brougham some hours earlier than usual, and sent it round to meet her, while, still carrying the letter

next her skin, she proceeded leisurely on foot to saunter through the quietest part of the park, whence nevertheless, herself unnoticed, she could obtain a view of the Ride and the equestrians who frequented it for their morning gallops.

Of course, a personal interview with Gerard, especially if accidental, would be more dignified, and also more to the purpose than thus suing him *in formâ pauperis*, as it were, by letter. Moreover, while the fresh spring air cooled her brow, and the gay enlivening scene, of which she herself constituted one of the fairest objects, raised her spirits, she began to think she might have been premature in her alarm, over-hasty in her conclusions. Supposing Gerard's secession was only accidental after all; supposing he was at that very moment hurrying back to town, or should even call at her house while she was out and receive her letter when he returned home, why, what would he think of her? How would he accept that last clause in it, tantamount to giving him up? Would he take her at her word? Not he! Surely, after all those years, he must love her still. The conviction stole into her senses like the soft spring air into her lungs, bringing with it warmth and vigour and vitality.

If it was true, ought she not to punish him just a little for his late defection? She could not quite make up her mind about the letter. At last she determined to send it, if she saw nothing of Gerard during her walk, feeling a vague sense of relief as though she had shifted responsibility from her own shoulders by thus wisely leaving the whole question to depend on the merest accident.

By this time she had unconsciously drawn nearer the Ride, and now her heart leaped into her mouth, for this was surely Mr. Ainslie galloping up on a bay horse discontented with his bridle. The cavalier gave her as much attention as he could spare in passing, but resembled Gerard as little as a stout, well-dyed, well-strapped, well-made-up elderly gentleman ever does resemble an able-bodied, athletic, weather-browned man in the prime of life. She scowled at him with bitter hatred totally uncalled for, and rather hard upon a stranger whose sole offence consisted in not being somebody else.

Two or three more disappointments, two or three hats flourished by men who knew that shapely figure well enough to recognise it at a hundred paces off, and Norah, with a heavy heart, and a certain weariness of gesture habitual to her when she was un-

happy, bent her steps towards the gate at which she expected to find her carriage, resolving that, at least for to-day, her chance was over. If in town, surely on so fine a morning he would have been riding in the park. Where could he be gone? The morning was not half so fine now. Well, she would post her letter, she thought, because she had told herself she would, and so drive sadly home, not to stir out again during the rest of the day.

CHAPTER IX.

DOUBLE ACROSTICS.

But Mrs. Vandeleur did not post her letter after all; certain unlooked-for circumstances, which will hereafter appear, having conspired to prevent this touching production ever reaching the hands for which it was intended. When the very box she meant to drop it into was cleared that morning, it disgorged a little note for Count Tourbillon, the delivery of which occasioned as much surprise as so imperturbable a gentleman was capable of feeling. It was short, couched in his own language, and written in a disguised hand, which might, as he told himself more than once, be the subterfuge of a lady, a lady's-maid, a bravo, a begging impostor—*parbleu!* even an assassin! It simply prayed him to render himself, as near twelve o'clock as he conveniently could,

at a certain spot in Kensington Gardens, where a person would be awaiting him; that person might easily be distinguished as holding the envelope of a letter in the left hand. The rendezvous, it must be well understood, was an affair, not of gallantry, but of business. It was to ask of the Count an important favour, but one which nevertheless it was impossible he could refuse. Finally, the matter in question had nothing to do with love or money, and affected him in no way personally; therefore it implored him, as a true gentleman, not to disappoint the writer.

Count Tourbillon propped this little missive against his looking-glass, and studied it throughout the whole of his morning toilet, continuing his reflections during the consumption of at least half-a-dozen cigarettes. Finally, arming himself with the indispensable umbrella, he sallied forth, resolved to penetrate this mystery, of which the most incomprehensible fold seemed to be that it depended in no way on his own attractions of appearance or conversation.

Few men have a sufficiently clear account with conscience to receive an anonymous letter unhaunted by some shadowy misgivings that one of their old half-forgotten iniquities has overtaken them at last. "*Raro antecedentem scelestum,*" says Horace, as

though he were actually quoting the Scriptural warning; "Be sure your sin will find you out." A long impunity makes men very bold, but even the most audacious cannot divest themselves of a vague, uncomfortable foreboding, that though the sky be still bright, a cloud is even now behind the hill; though they are yet untouched, the Avenger is even now bending his bow in the thicket, his shaft perhaps already singing and quivering through the calm air towards its mark.

By preference, by temperament, by education, Tourbillon was "*très philosophe*," a free-thinker, a doubter, a casuist, an *esprit fort*, and a *viveur*. Turned loose at sixteen into high French society—the best school for manners, the worst for morals, in the world—he would have laughed to scorn any feeble-minded Mentor who should have propounded to him the possibility that pleasure might not be the *summum bonum* of existence; that on analysing the great *desideratum*, the mood we are all aiming at—call it happiness, self-approval, repose, comfort, what you will—a certain property named "duty" might be found to constitute four-fifths of the wished-for whole, and that perhaps the honest health and strength of a bargeman or coal-porter might fill up

the remainder. Tourbillon, I say, would have scorned such a moralist as a well-meaning imbecile, and bade him take his trash elsewhere, with a little less than his usual cold suavity of deportment, because that the man within the man could not but feel chafed and irritated by the horse-hair garment of Truth, wearing through the velvet folds of Falsehood and Self-indulgence with which he was enwrapped.

Few people owed a longer score for peccadilloes, vices, even crimes, than this pleasant, plausible Parisian. That he had not the guilt of murder on his soul was owing to the merest accident ; it was no fault of his, as he told himself sometimes without a shudder, that he did not shoot Alphonse de Courcy through the head when they fought about a game of dominoes at Trieste—the Austrian officer who seconded him smoked as only Austrians can smoke, or his hand had been steadier than to shake those few extra grains of powder into the pistol, which caused it to throw an inch too high, and spoil De Courcy's hat instead of piercing that youth through the cavity in which he was supposed to keep his brains. Most of the other sins forbidden by the Decalogue, I fear, Tourbillon had committed

without scruple. Perhaps he never bore false witness; certainly never stole; but, *en revanche*, all the rest of his duty towards his neighbour, and especially towards his neighbour's wife, had been neglected and perverted from the day he first entered a *salon* in kid gloves and a tail-coat.

There are hundreds of such men about. Our own country is not without its share. People, good people, ask them to their houses, introduce them to their wives and daughters, shrug their shoulders when the antecedents of these guests are discussed, or observe forbearingly, "Wild, I fancy, formerly, and in one or two serious scrapes; but all that was abroad, you know, and one is justified in ignoring it. Besides, such an agreeable, well-informed fellow, and a thorough man of the world."

There is a vast deal of charity, you see, amongst our fellow-creatures—both that which consists in the giving of alms, or rather dinners, to those who are not in need, and of that which covers or excuses a multitude of sins, provided always the sinners be agreeable people of the stronger sex. Let a woman —the victim, we will say, of one of these pleasant diners-out—who has been led by her softer nature into the commission of a single fault, throw herself

on the mercy of this same generous, allowance-making society, and she will find she might as well have thrown herself from the roof of a London house on the area railings in the street below.

"Arthur! Arthur! is there no forgiveness?" groaned remorseful Launcelot from the depths of his longing, wayward, false, yet generous heart, while he sat in his mailed saddle, an unwilling rebel to the lord he had so cruelly wronged, and still so dearly loved. Since that good knight—the flower of bravery—repented him too late, how many a tender voice has sent up the same despairing cry in vain! how many a lonely sorrowing woman, eager but to prove the sincerity of her repentance, has wailed in agony for forgiveness on earth, which will only be granted her in heaven!

Count Tourbillon, I need scarcely say, was the last person to distress himself either by regrets for the past or apprehension for the future. Swallowing a qualm or two, as certain visions of a boy who knew no harm, walking at his mother's side in the gardens of a *château* by the Garonne, rose to his mind's eye, and reflecting that he was as well able to pull through a difficulty and hold his own now, as he had ever been in his life, the Count amused him-

self by speculating on the approaching interview, wondering of what nature a rendezvous could possibly be, in which the object was avowedly neither love nor war—an appointment made neither by an admirer nor an adversary.

"It is droll," said he. "Let us reflect a little. My faith! it is of those things which break the head to think about."

He broke his head thinking about it nevertheless, the whole way from Hyde Park Corner to the gate of Kensington Gardens. Each of the many faces he had loved and betrayed rose in succession to remind him of his vows, to reproach him with his perfidy, and, face by face, he dismissed them all without a sigh of pity, a twinge of remorse. He had not even the grace to wish he could undo the past, nor to persuade himself he would act differently if he had his time to come over again. Once only, amongst a score of others who had made a deeper impression on his fancy, he thought of Fanny Ainslie; but it was with a smile of amusement as he recalled her vivacious gestures, her quick temper, and her broken French.

Perhaps in all that phalanx of outraged beauty there might be *one* memory to avenge the cause of

her injured sisters, one Donna Anna, that this French Giovanni could not quite forget, one lovely phantom to spoil his rest, like her who haunted the couch of false Sextus—

"A woman fair and stately,
But pale as are the dead,
Who through the watches of the night
Sate spinning by his bed.

"And as she plied the distaff,
In a sweet voice and low,
She sang of great old houses,
And fights fought long ago.

"So spun she, and so sang she,
Until the East was grey,
Then pointed to her bleeding breast,
And shrieked, and fled away."

If so, he stifled her as resolutely as Othello, and with far less compunction. He bade her go back to her place of torment with the others; he could not attend to her now; he had newer matters on hand. Here he was, already at Kensington Gardens, and not a soul in sight but a gate-keeper in a long green coat and a hat with a gold-lace band.

It was a sweet May morning; nowhere sweeter and pleasanter than in grassy, shady, cockney Kensington Gardens. Being a first assignation, at least for aught he knew to the contrary, the Count was, therefore, a little before his time—just as he

would have been for a duel. Also, as before a duel, he proceeded to wile away the interval by smoking a cigar, enjoying the warmth of the sunshine, the purity of the air, the freshness of the early verdure, as keenly as if he had been a combination of Wordsworth and Howard, poet and philanthropist. I cannot help thinking there are a certain proportion of men born without consciences at all. It is not that they commit sin; all of us do that; but their enormities seem to burden them neither with anxiety nor remorse. They do not fidget beforehand, they make no resolutions of amendment afterwards; they travel on the broad gauge, so to speak, in first-class carriages, with easy springs, cushioned seats, and a supreme indifference to their destination. They are more plentiful in France than in England, and Count Tourbillon was a very perfect specimen of the class.

Smoking, then, in placid content under a young horse-chestnut, he watched with half-indulgent, half-cynical smiles, the usual business, amatory and otherwise, of this suburban resort, waking into its daily life. The first figure to intrude on his solitude was a foot-guardsman carrying a clothes-basket, followed by a dingy-looking woman, talking, perhaps scolding, with considerable energy. The

soldier plodded on inattentive, as one accustomed to the sounds.

"Husband and wife," said the Count to his cigar, with a shrug of the shoulders. "My faith, how badly it seems always to arrange itself, even amongst the *canaille*. Hold, here is something more interesting!"

A very pretty girl, with all the outward appliances of wealth, all those subdued graces of gesture which seem only acquired by the constant habit of living in society, was walking by the side of an invalid-chair with the head up, and a man in livery pushing it behind. Her neat boots, her well-gloved hands, her golden *chignon*, her beads, her bracelets, her draperies, all were *point device*, and denoted not only birth and breeding, but enough of fashion to make the Count wonder he did not know her by sight. She bent over the chair so affectionately, seemed so engrossed with its inmate, that Tourbillon felt positively interested, and moved several paces from his station for a nearer inspection of her companion; probably, he told himself, some handsome young lover disabled by a wound or an accident. Bah! the young lover was an old lady of fourscore, in a close bonnet and tortoise-shell spectacles, with trem-

bling hands in long-fingered gloves, and a poor, shaking, palsied head, that turned like the sunflower to the bright young beauty, who was, indeed, the light of its declining day.

"There are illusions," said the Count, replacing the cigar he had taken respectfully from his lips, "and there must of consequence be disillusions to counteract them! Such is the equipoise of existence. I wish my doubtful correspondent would appear with the envelope in his, her, its, left hand. It seems I am here in faction, with but a vague prospect of relief. Patience, '*à la guerre, comme à la guerre!*'"

Once more Tourbillon resigned himself to his vigil, which was getting rather wearisome, despite such interludes as a dripping water-dog shaking itself against his trousers, two little girls running their hoops simultaneously between his legs, and a petition from an incoherent slattern, apparently just out of an Asylum for Females of Weak Intellect, that he would be so good as to put her in the direct road to St. Pancras. He looked at his watch. It was scarcely twelve yet. He would make a little tour, he thought, to kill time, and so return to the appointed spot. He walked half-a-dozen paces,

rounded the huge smoke-blackened stem of a great elm-tree, and found himself, as he expressed it, "nose to nose" with Mr. Egremont. A bystander, had there been one, must have detected that the meeting was exceedingly *mal-à-propos*, they were so glad to see each other! Dolly, blushing violently, shook the Count's hand as if he were the dearest friend in the world. How was Tourbillon? He had not met him for ages. What had he been about? He had never thanked him enough for his kindness on a late occasion—and—had he been quite well since he saw him last?

The Count looked amused. Here was, indeed, something to kill time, not that he had any ill-nature about him, but that it was better fun to keep Dolly in a fidget than to smoke by himself till his correspondent arrived. That Dolly was in a fidget only became too obvious every moment. He glanced anxiously about, his colour went and came, he laughed nervously, and asked irrelevant questions without waiting for their answers. If the Count suspected the truth it was cruel thus to prolong the torture, but like a fish unskilfully played, that at last, with one desperate effort, snaps your line and makes off to sea, Dolly, catching a glimpse of a well-known

parasol, surmounting a well-known figure, broke from his tormentor with the courage of despair.

He had persuaded Miss Tregunter, not without difficulty, to take an early walk with him in these pleasant retreats. They were engaged, but their engagement had not yet been given out, so they agreed to be abroad before the gossiping public were about. It never entered the calculations of either that they would meet such a wordly spirit as Tourbillon in their new-found paradise.

A first *tête-à-tête* with the lady who has imposed on you a first pressure of her hand, a first avowal from her lips, and its ratification thereon, a first appointment to meet her, a first walk with her in Kew, Kensington, or any other garden of Eden, is a thing to enjoy while it lasts, to remember softly and kindly when it has passed away, but certainly not to be curtailed nor interrupted by an unsympathising idler whom it requires only a little moral courage to shake off. Dolly, therefore, seeing the wished-for figure in the distance amongst the trees, looked his captor boldly in the face, masking any bashfulness he might feel with a certain quaintness of manner that was natural to him.

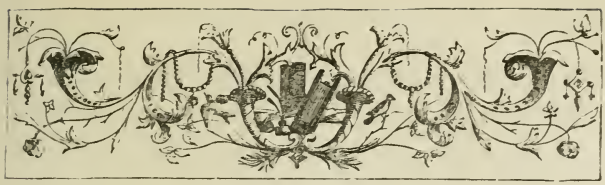
"I cannot stay now, Count," said he, "not another

moment. But I often come here, and will meet you if you like at the same time to-morrow."

"Ah! you come often here," repeated the Count, laughing. "So do not I. Tell me then, Monsieur Egremont, what do you find so attractive in such a solitary place?"

"I come here to make 'double acrostics!'" answered Dolly, unblushingly. "They require undivided attention, and I can't do them if I am disturbed."

Tourbillon clapped him on the shoulder, laughing heartily, "Good!" said he, "*mon brave!* Success to your double acrostics. I shall not try to find out their answers. But, trust me, my friend, you will compose them all the better for a little assistance. Your English proverb says, you know, 'two hearts, two heads,' what is it? 'are better than one!' I make you my compliments, and I leave you to find out its truth."



CHAPTER X.

THE STAR OF THE WEST.

Tourbillon looked wistfully after the retreating couple as they disappeared among the trees. For a moment he could have envied Mr. Egremont and Miss Tregunter their open, above-board, and avowed attachment. Only for a moment, soon reflecting that such matters were quite out of his line, that he was totally unfitted for the flat sameness of domestic life, that the only sort of woman, half devil, half coquette, who could hope to interest him now, was the last he would wish to place beside him in his home, and that he was actually here at this spot but in accordance with that evil spirit which made novelty, mystery, and intrigue the daily bread of his existence.

A rather stout, showy-looking lady, dressed in

black, came rapidly along the broad gravel walk, and when she approached the Count, disclosed, as if purposely, the envelope of a letter in her left hand. The Frenchman's eye brightened, his languor vanished in an instant. The hawk in her swoop, the leopard in his lair, the wolf on the slot, every beast of prey wakes into energy when its quarry comes in sight. Tourbillon took his hat off without hesitation, and wished her "Good morning," as if he had known her all his life.

"Madame has been most gracious in according me this interview," said he. "I have now to learn how I can be of service to Madame."

He tried hard to see her face, but a couple of black veils drawn tight, concealed the features as effectually as could any riding mask of the last century. His quick perceptions, however, took in at once that her figure was remarkably good, that she was exceedingly well-dressed, and that the jewellery, of which she wore a good deal, though very magnificent, was in perfect taste.

Her handkerchief, too, and this with a gentleman of Tourbillon's experience counted for something, was trimmed with an edging of broad and delicate lace.

"A lady," thought the Count, "no doubt. Not quite a *grande dame*, but still a person of position. Who can she be, and where can she have seen me before?"

He made no question, notwithstanding the protestations in her note, that this was a fresh conquest; assuming, therefore, his pleasantest manner and his sweetest smile,—but the bright face clouded, the comely cheek turned white with the first tones of her voice, while she replied—

"I know Count Tourbillon well. I think he cannot have forgotten me. I am sure he will not deny that I have a right to ask of him any favour I please."

He could only gasp out, "Fanchon! Madame Enslee! Just heaven! And I thought you were dead!"

"It would have made little difference to you if I had been," she answered, perfectly unmoved, but not without a touch of scorn. "It need make no difference to you now. Count, I did not come here to talk about yourself, but about somebody whose boots you were never fit to black. I speak pretty plain. I've come from the side of the water where people say what they mean, and give it mouth too."

"You did not think so once," he broke in angrily; and then growing conscious that the position was false, even ridiculous, continued more temperately, "We all make mistakes, Madame. This is a world of mistakes. I cannot see that it is the interest of either to injure the other. Circumstances conspired against us, but my feelings towards you have ever remained the same."

"I can easily believe it," she answered bitterly. "There was no love lost, Count, you may take your oath. I told you that, pretty smart, in the letter I left on my dressing-table at Milan. You used to laugh at my French, but you understood every word of those six lines, I'll be bound. Short and sweet, wasn't it? And what I said then I mean now."

"Your French, like everything about you, was always charming," he replied gallantly. "Shall we sit down, a little apart from the public walk? Your appearance, Madame, is sufficiently attractive to command attention anywhere."

"I'm sure if I'm not ashamed of my company you needn't be," said the lady, moving to a less conspicuous spot nevertheless, and lifting her double veil, that she might converse more freely. "I've

not much to say, and I shouldn't care if the whole world saw you and me together; but I don't want to be overheard, all the same."

Just the old, petulant, wilful, off-hand manner, he thought; the old self-scorn, the old want of tact, refinement, and good-breeding. Looking into her face, too, he could still recognise much of the bright, comely beauty that had so captivated his fancy for a few weeks many years ago. It was coarser now, indeed; bolder, harder, and what people call over-blown; but, notwithstanding her life of change, sorrow, excitement, and adventure, the miller's daughter was a handsome, striking looking woman, even yet.

You have already learned by Tourbillon's exclamation of astonishment that it was no other than Fanny Draper, or rather Mrs. Ainslie, who thus sat by his side in Kensington Gardens, whom he had never seen since she left him in a fit of anger, disgust, and passionate repentance, some two months after her desertion of Gerard, and whose subsequent career—extending over a good many years—would itself have filled a three-volume novel, rich in scrapes, situations, ups-and-downs, success, disappointment, and retribution.

Thrown on her own resources when she quitted the Count at Milan, Fanny determined to return home at once and try her fortune on the English stage. It was a profession to which she was specially adapted by nature, and in which her mobility of feature and peculiar style of beauty afforded great advantages. She had not forgotten Mr. Bruff's flattering estimate of her histrionic powers, nor the lessons he had given her in the humble country town, to which she even now looked back as to her one glimpse of paradise on earth. She avoided Ripley, and never went near her father, but plunged hastily into London, and, converting the few jewels she had brought with her into ready-money, got an engagement to dance in a minor theatre at eighteen shillings a week, and so put her foot on the lowest round of a ladder in which the topmost seemed hopelessly out of reach. It was the old story. Fanny Draper—or Miss Douglas, as she called herself—was fortunate enough to hit that combination of three properties which alone insures success,—these are, confidence, ability, and opportunity. Of the two first she possessed more than her share, and the last she owed to the sudden illness of a dashing young lady with beautiful legs,

who enacted the leading character in an extravaganza of which Fanny constituted a mere humble item in tights and spangles. Miss Douglas, on this fortunate occasion, advanced boldly to the rescue, accepted the part at an hour's notice, and was recognised as a star by the infallible criticism of a crowded gallery the moment she came to the footlights. Her legs were quite equal to the absentee's, her beauty infinitely superior, while her acting, as even the manager admitted, really was something like acting, and he increased her salary forthwith. She left him, nevertheless, at the end of his season, for a far better engagement, and the following year saw her starring it in the country and making five or six pounds a week. A break then occurred in Miss Douglas's career until she appeared again, as a Mrs. St. Germyn, at Liverpool, to take her benefit on the eve of a continental tour. Under different names she continued to perform at divers French theatres, in Russia, Prussia, and Austria, covering her deficiency of accent and pronunciation with an *espiéglerie* of manner that a foreign audience found irresistible, till, finally, being heard of as Madame Molinara, the great stage celebrity of New York, she was imported by indefatigable Dolly Egremont to retrieve a waning

reputation and replenish an exhausted cash-box for his Accordion Theatre.

Madame Molinara had not passed through so many vicissitudes without adding good store of experience to the mother-wit of which she enjoyed her full share, and she certainly did not put too low a price upon her talents. After a correspondence that nearly drove Dolly wild in its progress, and a stormy passage across the Atlantic highly conducive to health, behold the celebrated American actress, safely arrived in London, engaged at an exhorbitant price to take the leading part in a melodrama written by the husband from whom she had been separated for more years than she liked to count.

"It is itself as good as a play," said she, after detailing, in as few words as possible, the above information for the benefit of the attentive Count, who disappointed her, it must be admitted, by evincing so little surprise at the most startling points of her narrative. "They do say, Truth is stranger than Fiction; I'm sure, in my case, Romance whips Reality. And now to think of my sitting alongside of you, under an English elm! Dear, dear! what beautiful elms there was used to

stand in the park at Oakover! Why, that loafer there with a spaniel dog might almost realise we were two lovers taking a spell of courting. Well, well! We've all been fools in our day; but live and learn is my motto! And now, Count, what d'ye think made me write you that little note last night before I went to bed? Ah! you wouldn't guess from July to eternity. You're as sly as a 'possum: I know that of old; but I've fixed you there, I estimate. It's not often you get a Frenchman up a tree in what you was used to call—excuse my laughing—to call an affair of the heart."

Tourbillon was at a *non plus*. What could she be driving at, this hard, bold woman—with her hateful Americanisms and her loud coarse mirth? He felt confused, puzzled, even a little ashamed, to be thus taken aback. As before an armed adversary he would have fallen "on guard" by instinct, so with a feminine foe he unconsciously assumed those tactics that came most natural to him in dealing with the gentler and subtler sex. He must make love to her, he thought, *de rigueur;* must warm up the sentiments, never very palatable, that had stood cold so long, and compound the best dish he could of the hash. She expected it, of course, or why was she

there? With a practised glance from his bright, black eyes, of which he knew the power as well as the most finished coquette who ever wore petticoats, he took his companion's hand, and whispered softly:—

"You wrote to me, Fanchon,—yes, I call you Fanchon to-day, as I have called you by that endearing name for years, in my sorrows, in my solitude, in my dreams,—you sent for me because your heart, like mine, cannot quite forget. Because, like mine, it pines to resume once more the only true affection it has ever known. Because, in fine, we return after all our wanderings to our first attachments, and—and—though you would not trust your address to the chances of a letter, you will confide it to me now, and we shall speedily meet again."

She laughed once more,—heartily this time, and with such real enjoyment as convinced even Tourbillon's vanity that whatever motives led her to seek this interview, affection for himself had nothing to do with them.

"You whip creation, Count!" she said, wiping her eyes with the richly-laced handkerchief. "You do, indeed! Such cheek as yours was never so much

as heard of out of Paris. You carry on with so good a face too. Solemn enough to stop a clock! They spoiled a second Liston when they made you an attaché, or an ambassador, or whatever you are. I don't know whether you've done well in your own profession, but I'm availed you'd get along considerable in mine. Now if you'll stow all that gammon and speak common-sense for three minutes, I'll tell you my mind right away, and then make tracks. That ugly chap in a gold-laced hat has been looking our way till I'm tired of him. Listen, Count. This is something to your advantage!"

"You were always heartless," replied Tourbillon, in perfect good humour. "It is my misfortune. Speak, Madame, I am all attention."

"Now that's business," said the lady approvingly. "I suppose, monsieur, you won't deny that I know two or three things you'd just as soon I kept to myself."

He shrugged his shoulders carelessly, but with an affirmative gesture.

"Very well," she continued. "Now if you'll keep my secrets I'll keep yours. Is it a bargain?"

"Honour!" said the Count with a smile.

"Honour!" she repeated. "Ah! but is it honour as if I were a *man* and could call you to account? No. Don't get riled. I'm aware you'd make no bones about that! But is it honour such as you would pledge to another *gentleman*" (she put a bitter emphasis on the word) "like yourself?"

"Honour, madame!" he answered gravely, "as between man and man. On both sides!"

She seemed satisfied.

"Then to such honour I trust," said she, "that you will not betray me. That you will never recognise nor salute me in public, never divulge in private that the Madame Molinara of the play-bills owns a legal right to but one of all the names she has been called by, and that name she disgraced, not for your sake, you needn't think it! but because—well, never mind why. Perhaps because she had a wild fierce temper and a loving heart! You may sneer, Count, you often used, I remember, but I tell you, there is but one man in the world I'd walk fifty yards to serve, and that man was once my husband. Once! He's my husband still. Let me see who dare dispute it! But I'll never stand in his way, poor Gerard! I'll never be a clog and a blot, and a disgrace to *him*. If he fancies I'm dead and

gone, perhaps he'll think kindly of me now and then, who knows? We didn't hit it off so bad together just at first. It seems queer enough to remember it all now. Don't be afraid, Count, I'm not going to cry, but I can't keep from laughing. It's enough to make a cat laugh. Madame Molinara don't sound much like Fanny Draper, does it? Nor I don't look much like her neither—do I? There's but two people left in England I'm afraid of now that poor father's dead and gone, and me never to have seen him! But two in all England, Count, and you're one of them."

Tourbillon bowed, as accepting a compliment, adding—

"And Monsieur Ainslie, without doubt, is the other?"

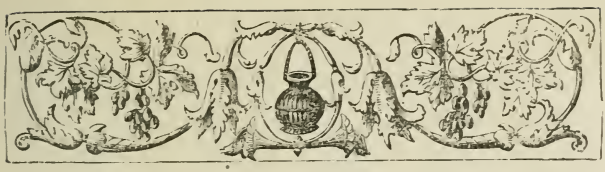
"Gerard!" she exclaimed, with another laugh, which stifled something like a sob. "Not he! Not if he was coming up the walk here, this instant. And dressed for the stage, bless you! Why he wouldn't know me from his grandmother. No, I can keep out of the other's way. She and I are little likely to meet in this great crowded town; but I own I was afraid of *you*. I remembered your ways of old. I knew that if you heard of a fresh face,

be she princess, actress, or chimney-sweep, you'd never rest till you'd seen her, and found out all about her, and made love to her, maybe, as you always do. That's why I've asked you to meet me here. That's why I've asked you to promise you will never let Mr. Ainslie nor anybody else know I'm alive and in England. Now, Count, can I depend upon you?"

"It is a bargain," answered Tourbillon, impressively; "on one side, as on the other!"

"Done!" she answered, shaking hands as if to ratify the compact, while she wished him good-bye. "I shall perhaps have one more look at him now. He'll never be the wiser. Of the other I have no fear—no fear. She's a real lady, and I—well, I'm an actress. Nothing better. I thank you, Tourbillon; I do, indeed. Good luck to you! From my heart I wish you well!"

So she walked out of the garden, staring superciliously on the unoffending guardian of the gate, while the Count, selecting his largest cigar, proceeded to light it thoughtfully and methodically, looking after his late companion with an air of whimsical consternation on his expressive countenance that language is powerless to describe.



CHAPTER XI.

"FAIS CE QUE DOIS."

Madame Molinara, or Fanny, as we may again call her, had confessed to the Count that, besides himself, there was but one person in London from whom she feared recognition, but one whom she dreaded to meet. Her feminine instincts warned her that if she should chance to come face to face with Mrs. Vandeleur, all attempt at further concealment would be in vain. The spirit of rivalry between women is far keener, subtler, more enduring than with men. The miller's daughter had loved Gerard Ainslie as dearly as it was in such a nature to love any human being, and was ready to prove her affection by voluntarily relinquishing every claim on her husband. She felt she could never make him happy; felt it now just as surely, though not so bitterly, as

in the first days of their married life. She had resolved, and in such a woman there was no small self-sacrifice in the resolution, that she would be contented but to hear that he was beloved by somebody more worthy of him. That should he choose to believe her dead (remember, Fanny's standard of morality was only in accordance with her education and her subsequent career), she would never undeceive him; trying to rejoice from her heart if she learned he was married to another—just as she had rejoiced when she read in the English newspapers of his succession to wealth that she never dreamed of asking him to share with her. To be sure her profession brought her in more money than she could spend; but had she been penniless, she felt it would have made no difference. With all her faults she was, in some respects, a thorough woman: in none more so than in certain overstrained sentiments of false pride and real generosity. True, she could have approved of Gerard's marriage to any other on earth rather than to Mrs. Vandeleur. Thousands of miles off a pang smote her when she saw in the *Times* how that lady had at last become a widow. But while her heart insisted Gerard would never care for anybody but Norah, her head reasoned

more coldly and rationally, that few attachments were rooted deep enough to withstand such contrary blasts as had swept over the White Rose, to outlive so long a frost as must have chilled and pierced her to the core. "No," she told herself, walking hastily homeward through the Park. "If they had been going to make a match of it they would have settled matters months ago. John Vandeleur's been dead long enough, in all conscience. My! what a wicked one he was! I wonder what's gone with him now! Well, it's no use bothering about that; I dare say Miss Norah's pretty much altered, too, by this time. I know I am, though the Yankees didn't seem to think there was a deal amiss with my outside neither! What will happen to my Gerard is this. Some young lady of title will fall in love with him, and they'll be married with two parsons and a dozen of bridesmaids, and I'll put on a thick veil and go up in the gallery to see it done. Suppose she don't suit him after all. That won't do at any price. No, we'll fix it different for his sake, though it's as bad as bitters to swallow down. If he must have the woman he set his foolish boy's heart on, why he shall. I'll give him up to her, I will. 'Specially if she's gone off in her looks; I shall

never know it though. I musn't meet her. It's my business to keep out of her way if I go barefoot a hundred miles. Jerusalem! If this isn't Miss Welby herself!"

Fanny had, indeed, bounced into the very arms of a lady making for a brougham waiting some twenty paces off, in the carriage-drive, whom she knew at once for Mrs. Vandeleur, and whom, in the confusion of the moment, she called out loud by her maiden-name. The recognition was instantaneous and mutual. Norah, turning as white as a sheet, felt ready to drop. With both hands she clung to the railing that guarded the footway, and strove to frame some commonplace words of greeting and surprise. In vain, for not a syllable would come.

Fanny recovered her senses first; more accustomed to situations of perplexity, she had acquired the useful habit of taking the bull by the horns, and she saw with a glance that the present was no time for deception or concealment. Acting always on impulse, it was her impulse at this moment to be frank, generous, and out-spoken. She, the woman who had right and power on her side, threw herself without hesitation on the mercy of the other.

"Miss Norah!" said she. "Miss Welby—I beg

your pardon, Mrs. Vandeleur. It's too late; you knew me; I saw you did. You was always a good friend to me and mine long ago. Be a good friend still. Will you keep my secret and his?"

"Your secret! His!" gasped Norah, still holding on to the rails. "Fanny—Mrs. Ainslie—what do you mean?"

The other had quite recovered her coolness now.

"Is that your carriage, ma'am?" said she, pointing to the brougham, with its two servants assiduously preparing for their mistress. "Will you give me a lift? I've something to say that can't be said out here amongst all these people. Oh! you needn't be afraid! I keep a carriage of my own now!"

This was unjust, for Mrs. Vandeleur, though she had not yet recovered her voice, expressed in dumb show exceeding goodwill thus to remove their unexpected interview from public gaze; but Fanny was prepared to be unjust, because with the one comprehensive glance that took in the other's features, complexion, bonnet, ear-rings, gloves, dress, and deportment, the uncomfortable truth obtruded itself, that never, even in her bright young days long ago, had the White Rose, spite of anxiety

and agitation, looked more queenly, more delicate, more beautiful, than at that moment.

It was a hard task Madame Molinara had set herself, but she resolved to go through it, reflecting with something of bitter sarcasm that, had she known beforehand her rival's beauty remained so untarnished, she would never have drifted into the false position that bade her do an act of generosity against her will.

Not till the door of the carriage was banged to, and the direction given for Fanny's residence, did Mrs. Vandeleur find her voice. It came at last, very weak and tremulous,—

"I was so startled just now, I could not tell you, but I am glad to see you again, Fanny. Indeed I am."

"That's nonsense," answered Fanny, with a good-humoured abruptness. "You oughtn't to be. You ought to hate me. You do. Just as I used to hate you. But you won't hate me any longer when I've told you all I want to say. What a noise these small broughams make, to be sure. One can't hear oneself speak. I suppose it's being so near the wheels."

Mrs. Vandeleur could hardly help smiling at this

display of a fastidious taste in carriages from the miller's daughter. Perhaps the other made the remark on purpose, intending thereby to place them both on a more commonplace and more equal footing; perhaps only with the nervous desire natural to us all, of putting off, if for ever so short a time, the fatal word or deed that must henceforth be irrevocable, irretrievable. There was silence for a few seconds between the two women, while each, scanning the other's exterior, wondered what Gerard could see to excuse his infatuation, but with this difference, that Mrs. Vandeleur marvelled honestly and from her heart, whereas the actress forced herself to stifle the conviction of her own inferiority in all, except mere physical attraction, that fascinated mankind. She broke it abruptly, and with an effort. "Miss Norah," said she, "Mrs. Vandeleur, do you think as bad people can ever be happy? Not if they're ever so prosperous? Don't believe it. I've been wicked enough myself, and now I'm so miserable—so miserable!" Her voice came thick and dry, while the lines that denote mental suffering deepened and hardened round her mouth. The comely face looked ten years older than when it smiled mockingly on Tourbillon half-an-hour ago.

Norah took her hand. "Nobody is too wicked," said she gently, "to repent, and to make amends."

"Repent!" echoed Fanny, almost in tones of anger; "I can't repent, I tell you. I'd do just the same if it was to come over again. But I can make amends, and I will too. Oh, Mrs. Vandeleur, you'll hate me, you'll despise me, you'll never forgive me when you know all. No more you ought not. I'll never forgive myself. And yet I'm not sorry for it really in my heart. I'm not. You cannot understand how I was tempted. You'd been used to gentlefolks all your life. To you, he was just one amongst a lot of others. But to me, he seemed like an angel out of heaven. Ay, the first time as ever I set eyes on him, walking through the fields, and watching of the May-fly on poor old Ripley water, I loved him so—I loved him so!"

"Loved him!" thought Norah, "and yet she could leave him for years, when she had a right to be near him. Ah! if I'd been in her place, I'd have followed my darling through the wide world, whether he liked it or not." But she felt that after all this woman was his wedded wife, while she—— Well, she had no right to speak, so she held her peace.

"Then I determined," continued Fanny, in a set, firm voice. "Yes, I swore, that come what might, I'd have him, if I died for it. I wasn't a good girl like you, Miss Norah. I wasn't brought up to be a good girl, though poor old daddy he was always the kindest of fathers to me. And I hadn't set foot in England two days afore I was down at Ripley, and through the orchard like a lapwing, making no doubt as I should find him with his arm over the half-door, and his dear old face, that's in heaven now, smiling through the flour, so pleased to see his little Fan. I ain't going to cry, Mrs. Vandeleur. Well, when I came round in front, the place was all shut up and boarded in. The garden plots was choked in nettles, the box had grown as high as my knees, the mill-wheel was stopped, and the sluice dry. I cried then, I did, for I knew I should never see him no more. It's a quiet little place they've buried him in. Close by mother, in a corner of Ripley churchyard. Oh! Mrs. Vandeleur, d'ye think he could have died without knowing as his little Fan would have given her two eyes to be at his bed-head, only for a minute? I can't bear to think it. I won't! I can't! I ain't going to cry. I ain't going to cry."

But she did cry, heartily, bursting into a passion of tears, as violent as it was soon over, while Mrs. Vandeleur, woman-like, wept a little, no doubt, for company.

"You've a good heart, you have," resumed the Miller's daughter, "and that's why I'm so sorry and so resolute. Look here, Mrs. Vandeleur, I stole away the man you loved, and—yes, I will say it out—as loved you, and made him my husband. There was others in the business, far more to blame than me,—others as stuck at nothing to get what they wanted, be it good or bad; but that's all past and gone now. Well, I know if right had been right, you should have had my Gerard" (Norah winced and shrank back into her corner of the carriage), "and you shall have him yet. Repent and make amends, says you. I can't repent, but I can make amends. Nobody but yourself and one other knows I'm in England, or even alive. I'll engage that one doesn't let the cat out of the bag. Besides, I've heard say that if a woman keeps seven years away from her husband, she's as good as dead to him in law, and he can marry again. You two might be very happy together. I don't want to see it; but I can bear to know it, if it's my own doing.

There, I've said my say, and here we are turning into Berner's Street."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Norah, struggling fiercely, as it were, with the evil spirit that was tempting her, radiant and seductive as an angel of light. "Impossible, Fanny! You mean kindly, generously, no doubt. But your marriage to—to Mr. Ainslie is lawful and binding so long as you both live. Nothing on earth can undo it. Besides, think of the scandal—the shame—the sin!"

"Oh, I don't go in for all that," answered Fanny, a little relieved, it may be, in her secret heart, by the rejection of her handsome offer. "I've got other things to think of. I can't sit with my hands before me, working it backwards and forwards like you ladies do. I've my own bread to make, you see, and very good bread it is, I can tell you. Why, I've a part to study now this very afternoon. And father isn't hardly cold in his grave," she added, with a strange, ghastly smile.

"A part to study," repeated Norah. "Oh, Fanny! you never will—you never can!"

"Folks must live," answered the other, with the hard, bold expression that had varied so often during their drive, settling over her face once more.

They had now reached Madame Molinara's door in Berners Street, and the brougham came to a stop.

"Fanny!" exclaimed Mrs. Vandeleur, "you mean to do right. You want to be better. We are both very miserable. I—I have more than I need of this world's wealth. Share with me. Leave the stage, and try to lead a different life. It is better, after all, to be good, than famous, admired, successful—even happy."

"I should go mad!" answered the other, wildly. "I should go thinking, thinking, thinking, till I was out of my mind. Nothing but the constant excitement keeps me in my senses. Come and see me act. Promise; I shall feel a better woman. Mrs. Vandeleur, you are an angel. If I dared I would say, 'God bless you!'"

She seized the corner of Norah's shawl, pressed it passionately once, twice, to her lips, darted from the carriage, and drawing both veils over her face, hurried across the street to disappear within her own door.

"Home!" said the White Rose, leaning back in solitude, and realising, for the first time, her utter desolation—the bitter loneliness of her lot,

the cruel mockery of a life, rich in empty appliances of outward show, but deprived of sympathy, debarred from happiness, and devoid of hope.

CHAPTER XII.

"ADVIENNE CE QUE POURRA."

It is a well-known truth, borne out by the moral and physical experience of every sufferer, that the severity of a wound or blow is not thoroughly appreciated till its immediate effects have passed away. A man breaks his collar-bone hunting, receives a sabre-cut, or even loses a limb, in action, and for a while, beyond a certain numbness and confusion, is scarcely aware that he has been hurt. So is it with a great sorrow. There is, first of all, an instinctive effort at resistance, not without something of the hard, stern joy brave spirits feel in every phase of strife, followed by a dead sensation of stupefaction and bewilderment, the lull, as it were, before the storm; then, after a dark, ghastly interval, a smarting pain, a pierc-

ing agony, the real punishment which wrings those most severely who clench their teeth, and knit their brows, and scorn to wince, or shrink, or cry aloud beneath the torture.

Norah looked very pale and stern when she walked into her own house; but she had quite made up her mind what she was going to do. With her head up, and a proud resolute step, like some priestess of old, prepared to officiate at the sacrifice, she marched into her drawing-room,—that room in which every article of furniture, every ornament and knick-knack, was now more or less associated with his presence,—and proceeded to ransack a little drawer in her writing-table, sacred to certain relics that had somehow connected themselves with Mr. Ainslie. These treasures were but few in number, and, to judge by appearance, of small intrinsic value; yet what a life's history they represented! what a wealth of affection, anxiety, longing, folly, and regret had been lavished on those poor, desultory, unconscious trifles! There lay the book he had given her long ago, in the days of annuals and keepsakes, at Marston Rectory. A gaudy little volume, bound in much-frayed red and gold. Its contents, I am bound to admit, were

of the trashiest and most nonsensical character. An engraving of an impossible woman in drooping ringlets, with an enormous straw hat, adorned the frontispiece, and to this deity such touching lines as the following, separated by a sheet of silver paper from their object, were addressed in ostentatious type :—

> "Lady, I look and wonder at thy face,
> Its perfect lineaments, its haughty grace :
> The fair pale brow, the calm and classic smile,
> The deep dark eyes, that brighten and beguile."

And so on, through some fifty verses, scored along the margin by a black-lead pencil, doubtless young Gerard's handiwork during intervals of deeper study at Mr. Archer's, and intended to convey his favourable criticism of the poetry, his entire concurrence in its tone of adoration, as applied to the young lady for whom he brought such works across the marshes in his pocket. Ah, those well-remembered marshes! She could see them now, with their wide, straight ditches gleaming in the summer sun, as she drove her ponies merrily across the level, looking here and there for the light, graceful figure that seldom disappointed her. Could it have been so long ago? and was it all

over—all over now? She pushed the book back into its drawer, and for a moment felt she had neither strength nor courage to make an end of her task, but, calling to mind the late interview with Fanny, nerved herself once more for her trial, and put this keepsake aside, to pack up with the rest. She had preserved it through her whole married life, and his, but to-day it must go once for all.

There was a dried flower, too, of what kind, in its then state of atrophy, it would have puzzled a botanist to decide; but Gerard had worn it in his coat that time when she saw him again after all those years of absence. Somehow it got detached, and had fallen out. She picked it off the carpet when he went away, and for a little kept it in a very warm place, which might account perhaps for its being so completely withered, before she hid it up with the other things in their drawer. Must that go too? Well, it was better it should; if she spared one, she might spare all, and right was right. She must not even *think* of Mrs. Ainslie's lawful husband any more!

Here was a note—a note in the dear familiar hand. It began formally enough, and might,

indeed, have been published word for word in the *Times* newspaper, containing as it did a very practical intimation that the writer had secured stalls for herself and Miss Tregunter at the French play. How well she remembered the vouchers coming from Mitchell's in their envelope, and the glee with which she put them in the fire! They didn't go near the French play after all. Not one of them cared in their hearts if they never entered a theatre again. No; far better than that, they all dined at deaf, kind old Lady Baker's. Herself, and Somebody, and Jane, and Dolly Egremont, with a couple of pleasant guardsmen, not particularly in love, to do the talking. Somebody took her down to dinner, and there was music afterwards, under cover of which certain whispers, meaning more than they expressed, passed unnoticed. Then, when it was time to go away, Somebody put her into her carriage, retaining, as his guerdon, the flower she had worn all the evening in her bosom, and pressing it fondly to his lips (she saw him by the light of her own carriage-lamps) as she drove away. Altogether it was an evening out of Paradise, and now there were to be no more of them. No more—no more!

The poor withered flower was drafted accordingly,

to accompany the other discarded mementoes of an affection that should have been broken off long ago, if it was to be destroyed at all. You may tear up a sapling with your hand, and mother earth, dame nature, whatever you please to call her, covers the gap over so effectually in six months, you would never guess she had sustained the slightest abrasion. But let your young tree grow for a few seasons, expanding to the sunshine, drinking in the rain, drawing sustenance and vitality from the very atmosphere, you must use cord, and lever, and grappling-iron, if you would displace it now. It is a question of strength, I admit, and you may root it up by main force like the other; but how long will it be before the grass grows over the place again? It must remain seamed, scarred, bare, and barren for the best part of a lifetime.

There was scarcely anything more to put away. A card he left with a few lines in pencil, expressing disappointment not to find her at home. A quill he had stripped of its feather clumsily enough, sitting in the very chair yonder by the window, while he laid his ground-plan several feet above the surface for one of those "castles in the air" he was never tired of building and furnishing, to make a future

habitation. Alas! she must not hope to enter it now. Perhaps, and the tears hung thick upon her eyelashes, she might occupy it with him hereafter, as one of the many mansions promised to the houseless ones in heaven.

The drawer was nearly empty. Nothing remained but a showy dog-collar of red morocco leather, with a little silver bell attached. Talking nonsense, as women will sometimes, and men too, when they are very happy, she had once threatened to have a watch-dog for her drawing-room weighing perhaps three pounds and a half, the smallest she boasted that could be got in London. Of course Gerard went in quest of such a toy the following morning, but pending his difficulties in procuring anything so small as she desired, zealously effected so much of his task as consisted in purchasing a collar, and sending it home forthwith. To Bill George, and other gentlemen of the Fancy in the same line, the period that had since elapsed afforded but a short space for their requisite inquiries and negotiations. Alas! it seemed as if years had passed away in the interim to the White Rose!

By what process of feminine reasoning she arrived at her conclusion it is not for me to explain, but

though she disregarded the collar, Norah felt herself justified in retaining the bell. This morsel of silver she fastened carefully to her watch-chain, then heaping the rest of the spoil together, packed it up very neatly, stuck half-a-dozen stamps on it, addressed the whole to Gerard Ainslie, Esq., in a firmer hand than common, and so sat down to cry. Do not judge her harshly. She was trying to do right, you see, and we all know, at least all who have ever turned their faces resolutely to the task, how steep and rugged is the upward path, how sharp its flints, how merciless its thorns, how grim and grey and desolate frowns that ridge of granite, to attain which all these efforts must be made, all these sufferings endured. It is not easy to be good. Never believe it, or why should Virtue win at last so lavish, so priceless a reward! Excelsior! Fight on, fight upwards; though heart sink, limbs fail, brain reel, and eyes be dimmed with tears of anguish, fight doggedly on! From that stern grey ridge you shall see the promised land, the golden mountains, and the narrow path, growing easier every step, that leads across the valley direct to the gates of heaven.

A woman is very much in earnest when she forgets

her luncheon. Robert Smart, who considered himself essentially Mrs. Vandeleur's footman, and looked on his fellow-servant in the same livery as a mere rear-rank man, a sort of make-weight and set-off to his own gorgeous presence, was accustomed at this period of the day, as indeed at many others, when he could find excuse, to ring a hand-bell with exceeding perseverance and energy. He seemed to think it becoming that next-door neighbours on both sides, and as much as possible of the street, should be advised whenever his mistress was about to partake of solid refreshment. On the present occasion, having laid his table gravely and decorously as usual, he applied himself with vigour to the luncheon-bell, and felt a little surprised to find that summons unattended by its usual result.

Robert, whose general appearance was of a kind much appreciated below stairs, affected the best of terms with the cook. That worthy woman, "keeping company," as she expressed it, with nobody in particular at the time, regarded him with sufficient approval. His attractions came out, indeed, in shining contrast with a baker whom she had lately jilted, and a desirable greengrocer whose attentions she already perceived looming in the distance.

Such a state of affairs was peculiarly favourable to domestic criticism on "the missis," her "sperrits," her "tantrums," her loss of appetite, and her "followers."

The bell had been rung more than ten minutes, and still no opening of doors, no rustle of draperies on the staircase, announced that Mrs. Vandeleur had gone down to luncheon. The cutlets would be cold, the grill uneatable, the new potatoes steamed to a consistency like soap. Already a "*soufflé* to follow" was at the very bubble of perfection. The cook lost patience. "Bob," she screamed from the foot of her kitchen-stairs, "whatever are you about up there, and why don't you bring down the first course?"

"Bob," as she called him, was tugging at his wristbands in the dining-room, but responded forthwith.

"She've never come to lunch at all," said he, looking disgusted at such transparent want of common-sense. "She've not been above-stairs or I must have heard her go. She've never left the drawing-room, and the things is all getting cold, and the carriage ordered at three to a moment."

The cook prided herself on an uncomplimentary abruptness, calling it "speaking her mind."

"Well," she replied, "you great gaby, why don't you ring the luncheon-bell again? If that didn't fetch her down, I'd go bold into the drawing-room and tell her myself, if it was me."

"No you wouldn't," replied Mr. Smart, from the top-step of the kitchen-stairs. "She've given orders not to be disturbed in that there room. I wouldn't go in for ninepence, not without I'd a reasonable excuse."

"Bother her orders!" replied the cook, insubordinate as it were *ex officio;* "she could but blow up like another."

"Missis never blows up," answered Robert, "I wish she would, but she've a way of looking at a chap when she ain't best pleased, as if he was the dirt beneath her feet. I don't like it, I tell ye; I ain't used to it."

"Ah, you've been spoilt, you have!" observed the cook, casting an anxious glance towards the kitchen and the *soufflé*.

"'Specially by the women-folk," retorted Mr. Smart, with his best air.

"Get along with ye," laughed the other, retiring

leisurely to the glowing recesses of her own dominions.

Fortunately for Robert's peace of mind a ring at the door-bell, and delivery of a note by the postman, furnished sufficient excuse for intrusion in the drawing-room. He returned from that apartment wearing a face of considerable importance, and proceeded to afford his fellow-servant the benefit of his experience.

"There's something up," observed he, with an air of great sagacity. "It's no wonder the luncheon's been left to get cold. There's Missis walking about the drawing-room taking on awful. I handed the note on a waiter as usual, and she stood looking out-a-winder, and never turned round to take it nor nothing. 'Thank you, James,' says she, for she didn't even know my step from his'n, 'put it down on the writing-table.' 'Luncheon's ready, ma'am,' says I. 'I don't want no luncheon,' says she, but I could tell by her voice she'd been cryin', cryin' fit to bust herself. I wish I knowed wot it was; I can't a-bear to see her so down for nothin'. It's a bad job you may depend. I wish it mayn't be a death in the family."

"I wish it mayn't be 'old Van' come back again,"

retorted the cook, who was of a less impressionable, and indeed more scoffing disposition. "She wouldn't like to be a widow bewitched, I know!"

"It's a bad job," repeated Mr. Smart, feeling, to do him justice, somewhat concerned for the obvious distress of the lady whose bread he ate (five times a day).

The cook laughed. "Look'ye here," said she. "I can see into a mill-stone as far as another. That chap with the brown beard hasn't been in our house for a fortnight, has he now? Nor he hasn't left his card neither, for I've been and looked in the basket myself every day. I mean him as was away foreign so long. Well, they do say as he kept company with Missis afore she was married, or anything, and that's what brought him here day after day, at all hours, whether or no. And now he never comes near her, nor nothing. Don't you see, you great stupe? She've been and lost her young man. That's why she takes on! Don't you trouble —she'll soon get another. Dear, dear—you men! What a thick-headed lot you are! And there's my stock draining away to rubbish all the while!"

So you see that Norah's distresses, however touching and high-flown they may have appeared

to herself, were susceptible of a broader, lower, more common-place view, when thus subjected to the impartial comments and criticism of her own servants in her own house.

CHAPTER XIII.

HUNTING HER DOWN.

Mrs. Vandeleur dried her tears, and read the note humbly enough. She knew the handwriting to be Burton's, and at another time would have accepted such a communication with something of impatience, if not scorn. It was her worst symptom, she thought, that she should feel too weary and wretched to-day to be angry with anything. Though rather a crafty production, and though her thoughts wandered so heedlessly to other matters, that it was not till the second perusal she gathered its real meaning and object, there was nothing in the following appeal to her own sense of justice which did not seem perfectly fair and above-board.

"Dear Mrs. Vandeleur,

"Under existing circumstances, and after

our unfortunate misunderstanding, you will be surprised to see my signature to a note, or rather a letter (for I have much to explain), addressed to yourself. Surprised, but may I venture to hope, not offended? Indeed, you have no cause for offence. None can regret more deeply than myself the chain of untoward accidents that have conspired to lower me in your opinion, nor the consequent estrangement of a lady whose esteem I value exceedingly, and whom I was formerly permitted to consider one of my oldest and kindest friends. Whatever hopes I may have cherished, whatever feelings I may have entertained of a more presumptuous nature, shall assuredly never again be expressed in words. As far as you are concerned, it is as though they had never been. If I choose to treasure up a memory in the place where I never ought to have planted a hope, that must be my own affair, and you are welcome to call me a fool for my pains. But enough of this. I am now writing less as a suppliant imploring mercy, than an injured man demanding justice. I have tried over and over again for an opportunity of defending my conduct in person; I am at last driven to the less agreeable task of excusing myself by letter. Do not be im-

patient and unfair. I only ask you to read this in the spirit in which it is written.

"You had reason, good reason, I frankly admit, to be very deeply offended many months ago, and our outward reconciliation since then, though plausible enough, has not, I feel, been of a nature to re-establish terms of common cordiality and good will. You thought me—and I cannot blame you—overbold, intriguing, and unscrupulous. You judged me guilty of gross presumption, of an act scarcely permissible to a gentleman, and I allow appearances were very much to my disadvantage. Ah! Mrs. Vandeleur, you little knew the feelings that prompted a step I have never since ceased to regret. You little knew my jealousy—mine! without a shadow of right—concerning everything that could be said, or thought, about one who was my ideal of goodness and truth. I felt persuaded it was impossible for you to do wrong. I felt equally determined to ascertain the origin of a thousand rumours, that it drove me wild to hear, and obtain for myself the power, if not the right, to contradict them on my own responsibility.

"In doing this I offended you beyond redemption. I do not deny your grievance. I do not wish to

dwell one moment on so painful a subject. I only ask you to believe in my regret, in my sincerity; to place on my subsequent conduct that favourable construction which I have never forfeited by my actions, and to meet me in the world as a friend—nothing more. But, I entreat you, Mrs. Vandeleur, nothing less.

"Good-natured Dolly Egremont has sent me his box at the Accordion for the 10th. Though too near the stage, it is the best in the house. I am anxious to make up a party of people who know each other well, and have already secured Miss Tregunter. She can only spare us the evenings now from shopping for her *trousseau*. There are a few more, all favourites of your own. Can you be persuaded to join us? You will be doing a kindness to a great many people. You will be amused—even interested; and you will prove to me that, if not forgotten, at least my ill-judged precipitancy has been forgiven. Please send an answer, though I will take care a place is kept for you at any rate.

"Little news this morning at White's or Boodle's. Lady Featherbrain is going to marry her old admirer after all. She has just driven him down St. James's Street in her mail-phaeton. They are taking five

to two that she throws him out or throws him over before next Monday, the day for which the match is fixed. Young Fielder has not bolted after all. His father pays up, and he is to exchange. Poor Cotherstone, I fear, is dying. This, of course, will disqualify Purity, Hydropathist, and a great many more of the Clearwells that are never likely to be favourites.

"I had almost forgotten to say our box is for the first night of Gerard Ainslie's play. I hear it is to be a great success. Come and give your opinion. I shall then know that I may subscribe myself, as ever,

"Your sincere friend,

"Granville Burton."

"Poor fellow! I wonder whether he can really have cared for me, after all!" was Mrs. Vandeleur's first thought when she read the above apologetic epistle. "Not a bit of it!" was her next, as she reflected on its measured diction and well-chosen expressions, artfully selected to avoid the remotest shadow of offence. "No. If it had come from his heart there would have been a little bitter to mix with all that sweet. Gerard would have reproached me half-a-dozen times in as many lines if he had

felt ill-used. Ah! I don't believe anybody in the world ever cared for me as I like to be cared for, except Gerard. And now we must never meet. It does seem so hard! Well, I may go and see his play, at any rate. There can't be much harm in that. I suppose I must write a civil line to accept. I'll try and find Jane first. It looks odd of Mr. Burton, too, getting this box and then asking me to join his party. I'll wear my grey satin, I think, with the black lace. I wonder what he can be driving at!"

It was indeed impossible for her to guess, but Granville Burton did not usually drive at anything without being sure of the goal he intended to attain. In the present instance he had a great many objects in view, and the design of making a great many people uncomfortable—Dolly Egremont, his affianced bride, Gerard Ainslie, Mrs. Vandeleur, himself not a little, inasmuch as the scratches he had sustained while endeavouring to detach the White Rose from her stem still smarted and rankled to the quick; lastly, Madame Molinara, once the miller's daughter at Ripley, now the famous American star, whose name in letters four feet long was placarded on every dead wall in the metropolis.

Fanny's incognito had proved more difficult of preservation than she anticipated. Like many others, she imitated the ostrich, and hoped to escape observation only because it was her own desire to avoid notice. It is strange that her experience in the United States, where it is everybody's business to find out his neighbour's, had not taught her better. Such men as Granville Burton make a profession of knowing all about a new celebrity, never learning less, usually more than the actual truth. Inquiring where they were born, and how and why? Ascertaining their education, their manners, their private means,—above all, their secret peccadilloes. It is so pleasant to feel possessed of the freshest news at a dinner-party, to keep the key of a secret that shall excite all those guests to envious attention, watching or making the wished-for opportunity, and then, with calm superiority, proceeding in measured tones to detail that wicked little anecdote which nobody in London has heard before, that startling bit of news which has not yet found its way into the afternoon club, or the evening paper. But, like the fishmonger, you must be careful no opposition dealer has fresher wares than yours. If once your story be capped, or its authenticity disputed by a better-

informed rival, farewell to your superiority for weeks. Such a check is sometimes not to be got over in the whole of a London season.

Burton knew Count Tourbillon, of course, just as he knew every other notorious man in London. Equally, of course, while they smoked their cigars in the sun (as we are glad to do in England), their discourse, originally attracted to the theme by a hurried nod Dolly Egremont gave them in passing, turned on that new celebrity who, so the world said, was to make the fortune of their friend, his company, and every one connected, however remotely, with the Accordion Theatre.

"They say she's a wonderful actress," observed the Dandy, in languid afternoon tones, as of a man whom no subject on earth could heartily interest.

"My faith—no!" replied the Count. "Quick, brilliant, versatile, and producing great effect in superficial parts; but for true passion, for deep, repressed feeling—bah! She has no more power to express it than a ballet-dancer. See, she would make fury with an audience in the part of Lady Teazle. She would be hissed off after ten minutes if she attempted to play Ruth."

"You've seen her act?" inquired Burton.

"I have seen her act," answered Tourbillon, in measured tones, repressing with difficulty the mocking smile his own words called up.

"Good-looking, they tell me," continued the Dandy, taking his hat off to a lady on horseback.

"Only on the stage," replied the other. "Hers is a beauty that needs the accessories of dress, jewels, lights, illusion. If you walked with her through a garden at sunset, you would say, 'I have deceived myself. This is a wearisome woman. Let us go to supper.' And she would accept the invitation willingly. *Enfin c'est une bonne grosse bourgeoise, et tout est dit!*"

"Then you know her!" exclaimed Burton, waking up from his lethargy, delighted to think he could learn some particulars of the celebrity about whom everybody was talking.

"A friend of mine was once much entangled with her," answered the ready Frenchman. "Poor fellow! I do not like to think of it now. It is a sad story. *Parlons d'autre chose.*"

But he had said enough to put his companion on the track, and with dogged perseverance Dandy Burton hunted it, step by step, till he had found out the truth, the whole truth, and a good deal more

than the truth. With his large acquaintance, his inquiring turn of mind in all matters of scandal, his utter contempt for fair-dealing in everything allied to the search for information, and the use he put it to when acquired, the Dandy could ferret out a mystery more promptly and certainly than any man, unconnected with the detective profession, in the whole of London.

Perhaps his experience on the turf stood him in good stead, perhaps he was no little indebted to his own natural cunning and predilection for intrigue, but in a very few days he had identified Madame Molinara with the real Mrs. Ainslie, his former acquaintance Fanny Draper, of Ripley Mill; had satisfied himself the important discovery remained as yet almost exclusively his own, and had set about laying the train for a little explosion from which he anticipated much gratification in the way of spite, malice, and revenge.

His information had cost him a dinner at his club to the American minister, an invitation for a duchess' ball to an Italian gentleman once connected with the theatre at Milan, a box of cigars to Mr. Barrington Belgrave, formerly Bruff, and three half-crowns at intervals to a seedy individual in black, once a tout,

lately a dog-stealer, now a professional vagabond. He considered the results very cheap at the money.

Dolly Egremont's box was then secured for the first night of *Pope Clement, or the Cardinal's Collapse.* It would be a great stroke of business, thought the Dandy, to collect in that narrow space the following elements, both discordant and sympathetic :—

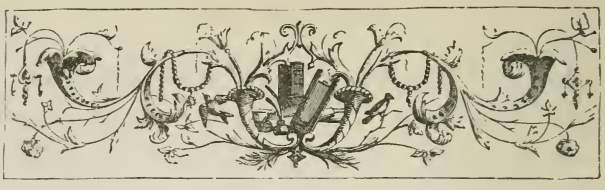
First, Miss Tregunter, on whose feelings the blazing effects of Madame Molinara's attractions, and the general stage business in which her plighted bridegroom must necessarily be absorbed, could not fail to produce a very disagreeable impression.

Next, Dolly himself, over whom the ill-humour of his lady-love would lower like a blight, withering up his good spirits and good-humour during the ensuing twenty-four hours, and making him wish, perhaps, for an evil moment, that he had left his petulant passion-flower blooming on her stalk.

Then Gerard Ainslie, the author of the piece, to whom such an unwelcome appearance of a wife he had forgotten, thus resuscitated to enact the leading part in his play, would be a bug-bear none the less startling, that he witnessed it for the first time by the side of the woman he had loved so long, and had hoped at last to make his own.

And she! The White Rose! Burton would have his revenge then! That pride of hers, that had over-ridden him so haughtily, would be humbled to the dust; and in his own presence too, by his own dexterity. Perhaps, in her despair and her humiliation, the forbearance, the generosity, the good feeling he would make it his business to display, might win her for him after all.

Norah wondered, as we have learned, "what the Dandy was driving at." She would have been indignant, no doubt, but she must have felt flattered, could she have known that to attain his goal he would have spared neither whipcord nor horseflesh, grudged no material, shrank from no risk, shutting his eyes to the probability of an upset, the certainty of a break-down, and the undoubted absurdity of the whole journey.



CHAPTER XIV.

PALLIATIVES.

Mrs. Vandeleur dried her tears and rang for the carriage. It had been twenty minutes at the door. She hastened upstairs, bathed her eyes, sprinkled a little dirt in the shape of pearl-powder on her face, and, discarding her maid's choice, selected a bonnet she considered more becoming under the circumstances. It was no use looking her worst, she thought; and despite such judicious applications, the tell-tale eyelids were still reddened—the delicate face was paler than its wont. But she felt better. Some of the sharpness of the blow had passed away. Burton's letter proved to a certain extent an anodyne. It diverted her mind from the one great sorrow, gave her cause for reflection as to what she must decide about the play, and, above all, opened up a narrow

glimpse of hope. Yes, there was a chance, nay, almost a certainty, of seeing Gerard once again. Happiness is, after all, very relative. Yesterday she pined and fretted because she could not spend her whole life with him; to-day she blessed and cherished the mere possibility of hearing his voice for five minutes in the crowded box of a theatre!

Of course he would come! She had heard much of the eagerness with which authors are believed to watch the progress of their own productions, and not being familiar with the class, voted it an impossibility that Gerard should absent himself from the Accordion on the first night of his play. Madame Molinara, too, had made such a point of her presence. Poor Fanny might feel hurt if she never went to see her act. This would be an excellent opportunity; and to find husband and wife under the same roof, whether they recognised each other or not, would confirm her own good resolutions so strongly, and be so beneficial to herself! The last seemed an unanswerable argument. She was persuaded, no doubt, that for a hundred such reasons, and not because of her intense thirst and longing to set eyes on Gerard once more, she had determined to accept Burton's invitation, should she find on inquiry there

was any likelihood Mr. Ainslie would make one of the party.

To ascertain this point, she bethought herself it would be well to call on Jane Tregunter forthwith. Were not Gerard Ainslie and Dolly Egremont fast friends, sure to be familiar with each other's movements? Was not the latter gentleman bound in the most abject slavery to his affianced bride? He could have no secrets from dear Jane, and dear Jane, she was sure, had no secrets from her.

Now, with Miss Tregunter's family, and in her own circle, there existed a pleasant fiction, upheld zealously enough, that the heiress never occupied her excellent town house in solitude, or, as she was pleased to term it, "on her own hook."

Relatives of different degrees, but of steady age and habits, were supposed to reside with her in continual succession, thus warding off the offensive strictures of Mrs. Grundy, who, with her usual consistency, saw not the slightest impropriety so long as the young lady only ordered her own carriages at her own time to go where she pleased, with entire independence of action when out of her own house.

It was at present Aunt Emily's turn of duty to mount guard over her niece, but Aunt Emily, who

was prolific, and fond of her children, had been summoned home to nurse a croupy little girl, the youngest of ten, and Jane Tregunter, absorbed in her *trousseau*, was just as much a *femme seule* as Lady Baker, who had buried two husbands, and might have seen out half a dozen, or Madame Molinara, who had found one more than enough.

All this she explained with considerable volubility, before Norah had been in the house five minutes, pausing in her discourse but once to kiss her visitor rapturously, and exclaim—

"Darling! What a love of a bonnet!"

"And so, dear," continued the *fiancée*, "here I am, as independent as the Queen of Sheba, only mine isn't a Solomon, you know; far from it, dear fellow! he was always a goose; but then he's such an honest one. And I'm ready to go anywhere with you, and do anything, and, in short, I'm game for any enormity you like to mention in the way of a lark. Only put a name to it and here you are! Do you know, it's a great pull not having married young——Nonsense, Norah, I'm very nearly as old as you, only I don't look it! That sounds complimentary! Darling, you know I always said you were beautiful, and so you are, but it's impossible for me, with

my chubby cheeks, and turned-up nose, ever to look like anything but a school-girl! I wish it wasn't. It's so much nicer to have some expression of countenance. A woman at my age should have lost her baby-face. She ought to seem more as if she had 'been, done, and suffered,' like a verb, you know. Even Dolly says yours is the most loveable face he ever saw. I'm not jealous though. I don't consider him a very good judge, so you see I'm not vain either, though you'll declare I am when I've taken you upstairs to show you my new dresses, and I'm sure the presents on that table in the back drawing-room are enough to make one as proud as a peacock!"

It is, perhaps, needless to observe that for everybody who came to call on the future Mrs. Egremont, these "presents in the back drawing-room" were just as much a part of the show as the new gowns, the new bonnets, the new stockings, handkerchiefs, gloves, and petticoats, nay, the new *fiancée* herself.

Mrs. Vandeleur, as in duty bound, exhausted her whole vocabulary of praise. "Beautiful! exquisite! uncommon! perfect! How thoroughly French! How completely Spanish! What extraordinary workmanship, in such good taste too! And the

writing-case, dear, it must have been made on purpose; who gave you that?"

Miss Tregunter's rosy face became the rosier for a passing suffusion. "Oh, that is a little attention of Mr. Burton's. You know he proposed to me, dear. Wasn't it funny? Do you think I ought to take it?"

Mrs. Vandeleur opened her blue eyes. "Proposed to you, Jane!" she repeated. "And you never told me! When was it?"

"Oh! a long time ago," answered the other, hastily. "At the end of last season, just before I went abroad. I met him the same night at Lady Featherbrain's fancy ball. Wasn't it awkward?"

Norah pondered. That was the very day she had herself refused this adventurous swain, without, however, considering it necessary to confide his offer to her intimate friend. Obviously, neither lady had been sufficiently proud of her conquest to make it public.

"Well, you can't send it back now," she replied, gravely; adding, after a moment's thought, "Janey, you were quite right not to marry him."

"Marry him!" echoed Miss Tregunter, and the tone sufficiently convinced her listener that Dolly

never had anything to fear from the rivalry of his old fellow-pupil.

"But what a duck of a bracelet!" continued Mrs. Vandeleur, taking from the purple morocco case in which it was coiled an unequalled specimen of the jeweller's art.

"Oh! the bracelet," exclaimed the other. "Isn't it a love? Isn't it per—fection! Now, who do you suppose sent me that? I can't think why, I'm sure, except that he is a great friend of yours. Who but dear, quiet, melancholy, good-looking Mr. Ainslie. The jewels are magnificent, and the setting *too* beautiful! Do you know, Norah, every morsel of that gold he found and dug out himself, while he was in Australia or California, or wherever people go who are ruined, and want to make their fortunes!"

It was Mrs. Vandeleur's turn to blush, but she hid her crimson face over the ornament, and in a few seconds it had grown even paler than before.

He dug the gold himself, did he, poor fellow! How she pictured in her mind the bivouac fires, the red shirts, the bronzed, bearded comrades, the barren ridges, the starlit sky, the gloomy, desolate grandeur of the scene. She could almost fancy she saw the

dear face, thoughtful, weather-beaten, careworn, gazing wistfully into the glowing embers, while his thoughts travelled back to England; or hushed and calm in sleep, while he dreamed of the woman he had loved so hopelessly and so well.

A tear fell heavily on those burnished links of hard-won gold. It was all very well to be patient, resolute, right-minded, but the rebellious heart *would* make itself heard, and she *must* see him once again. Just once again, and then she would accept her fate!

"Janey," asked the White Rose, discreetly changing the subject as far as her companion was concerned. "What are you going to do on the 10th? I had some thoughts of the play if this cool weather lasts. Come and dine with me. I'll ask Mr. Egremont, of course, and we'll all go together."

"Play! my dear," answered the other. "I'm sick of the very name of plays. How any man in his senses can make himself the slave Dolly is to a parcel of odious mountebanks, seems to me perfectly incomprehensible. Would you believe it, Norah, he never got away from that hateful Accordion till half-past twelve last night? And he

couldn't stay to luncheon, or you'd have found him here, where, to be sure, he'd have been rather in our way, because he had a disgusting rehearsal at two. Then the letters he gets, and the bills, and the bothers with the newspapers, and those shocking actresses! My dear, it's a continual worry, that drives me out of my senses!"

"I suppose you will soon put a stop to it," observed Mrs. Vandeleur, meaningly.

"I believe you!" answered Jane. "Wait till I'm fairly in the saddle, and if I don't make him as tractable as Tomboy, I'm very much mistaken. Poor fellow! it's only fair to say he'd get out of it at once if he could, but he's so deep in the thing now, he must go on till the theatre closes. I wish they'd shut it up to-morrow. Well, *qui vivra verra.* If that Madame Molinara ever sets foot in my house, I'll give her leave to stay there for good and all!"

Ere Miss Tregunter could work herself into a fume under this imaginary grievance, Norah recalled the conversation artfully to the point.

"Then you'd rather not go, dear?" said she, in her soft, quiet tones. "Don't, if it bores you."

"I must," replied this energetic martyr. "I can't get out of it. I'll come to you and welcome, but

we must dine awfully early, for I've promised to be there for the first scene. It's some new play Dolly makes a ridiculous fuss about, only because this dreadful American woman acts in it, I verily believe. There's a lot of us going, Theresa, and Cousin Charlie, and Mr. Ainslie; and, in short, as many as the box will hold. It's Mr. Burton's party, and I don't want to be ruder to him just now than I can help."

Mrs. Vandeleur's heart gave a little leap, not, I imagine, from the prospect of meeting either Theresa or Cousin Charlie. She would see Gerard then, possibly speak to him, and it would, of course, be much easier after that to sustain an eternal separation.

She steadied her voice admirably while she repeated her invitation, begging the guest to name her own dinner-hour, insisting with unusual energy on the inconvenience of making it too late.

"And now," said Miss Tregunter, holding the door open with the air of a chairman at a Board of Directors, "all this is what I call extraneous matter. Let us proceed with the *real* business of the meeting."

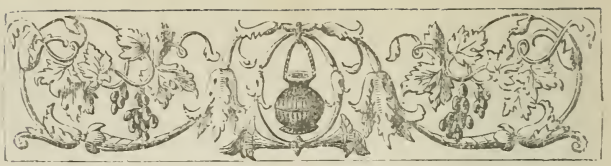
I suppose that to our coarser male organization the deep and beautiful sublimity of Dress must ever

remain a forbidden worship—a mystery unrevealed. Not to man's grosser sense is vouchsafed the judicious taste in colour, the discriminating touch for texture, the unerring glance for shape. We possess, indeed, our uniforms (hideous), our sporting dresses (barbarous), our official costumes (grotesque), but to the stronger and stupider animal undoubtedly has been denied that heartfelt rapture which in all matters of gauzes, muslins, silks, satins, and brocades, springs from a sense essentially feminine, to be termed with propriety "the pleasure of the eye."

Miss Tregunter's *trousseau*, exclusive of a closet in which, like Bluebeard's wives, hung six various-coloured dresses, filled two spacious bedrooms and a dressing-room. For one heavenly half-hour the ladies roamed at will through these gardens of delight. During this too brief period of enjoyment, it is my belief that Miss Tregunter, except as a remote first cause for such gratifying display, never gave her future husband a thought, that the pain in Mrs. Vandeleur's fond heart was lulled, even deadened, by the power of that wondrous magic which has never been known to fail. Alas! that it came out all the sharper and more piercing later in the day, when, driving home,

she met the well-known figure on horseback. And Gerard Ainslie, not stopping to speak, took his hat off with a cold, proud, distant greeting.

It was some little consolation to mark that he looked pale, worn, and ill; to gather from his appearance that he too was not without his cares; that however cross he might be, he felt likewise almost as unhappy as herself.



CHAPTER XV.

ANODYNES.

Would she have loved him better had she guessed his morning's work? Does not the water-lily, torn cruelly up by its roots, only to slide from an eager, disappointed grasp, seem fairer and fairer as the pitiless stream bears it farther and farther out of reach? Are any of us really aware of its worth while our treasure lies under lock and key, ready to gladden the eye, and warm the heart at our daily caprice? No. I think when the thief is at the door, we wake to a sense of its importance, perhaps only to learn its full value, when the casket has been rifled and the jewel stolen away.

Gerard Ainslie, like the majority of mankind, was not so constituted as to resist oft-repeated attacks of vexation and disappointment. Nay, there was so

much of the woman in his temperament as rendered him patient and trusting at one season, suspicious and easily disheartened at another. Like a woman, too, while full of courage to dare, and fortitude to endure, there were certain blows from which he made no effort to recover, certain injuries he would accept unresisting, to sink under them without a struggle. When the poor camel falls beneath that last ounce of burden, the meek eyes only urge reproach in silence; the weary head droops gently to its rest without complaint, but never rises from the desert sand again! Some years ago, perhaps, our gold-digger might have faced a great sorrow as becomes a man, but the heart has thus much of affinity with the brain—should I not add, the stomach?—that it will only bear a fixed amount of ill-usage, or even of justifiable wear-and-tear. Take too many liberties with it, and, no more than the intellect or the digestion, will it continue to perform its functions. There comes a paralysis of the feelings, as of the senses; and that is indeed a dreary death-in-life which drops its arms in hopeless lassitude, and says, "I have shot my bolt; I have run my chance—sink or swim, what matter? I accept my fate!"

Rank cowardice, is it not? But a cowardice to which the bravest spirits are sometimes the most susceptible. Accept your fate! What is this but yielding the stakes before the game is played out? Scuttling the ship before she strikes and fills? Surrendering the fort, and going over with arms, standards, and ammunition to the enemy? The man who succeeds in love, war, money-making, is he who will not accept his fate—no, not though it be rammed down his throat!—but frowns, and grins, and strives, never yielding an inch, unless to win back two, and so by sheer force of dogged obstinacy and perseverance, gaining the hard fight at last, and grasping the prize—to find, perhaps, after all, that it is scarce worth taking. Never mind, however valueless the victory, the struggle is not without its good results.

Now Gerard, from an inconsistency of character peculiar to such sensitive dispositions, though he had hoped on while there really seemed no hope, gallantly enough, became so relaxed by a gleam of unexpected happiness, that when adversity lowered once more, he could not endure the reaction, and gave in. He felt like some mariner, who, after battling with contrary gales a whole voyage

through, makes his port in a fair wind that veers round and drives him out to sea again ere he can enter the harbour. Like some gold-seeker, who has travelled, and starved, and shivered, and prospected, and reached a likely spot at last, to find nothing but quartz, dirty water, sand, perhaps a little mica, but never a grain of the pure, yellow, virgin gold.

I do not hold this man was by any means wise thus to set up a fellow-creature for a fetish, and exact from his idol supernatural perfection; but, having adopted the superstition, degrading or otherwise, it would perhaps have been more consistent and more comfortable to stick fanatically to his worship, how much soever the image had become defaced, its pedestal lowered, its gilding tarnished, or its paint worn off.

It is a hard truth, but probably no woman that ever wore a smile is worth one-tenth of the vexation, the longing, the weariness of spirit, caused by hundreds of them in hearts twice as kindly and honest as their own. Yet if men did not thus put a fictitious price on that which they covet, and pay it too, readily enough, what would become of romance, poetry, three volume novels, the book of fashions, and the ladies' newspaper? Cosmetics would be a

drug, *chignons* unsaleable, jewellers might shut up shop, Madame Dêvy would be bankrupt, Madame Vigoureuse paralysed, and Madame Rachel in the bench.

Such questions of demand and supply never occurred to Gerard's aching heart. Sore and angry, he determined that Norah was no longer worthy of her place in his breast, and resolved, therefore, unphilosophically enough, to make himself as miserable as he could during the rest of his life. He was one of those gentlemen, very scarce, they tell me, in the present day, who despise Moore's sagacious warning,—

> "'Tis folly when flowers around us rise,
> To make light of the rest if the rose be not there,
> And the world is so rich in voluptuous eyes,
> 'Twere a pity to limit one's love to a pair."

Like a spoilt child whose favourite toy is broken, he declined to play any more, and refused to be comforted.

There is a strange impulse in restless spirits, that urges them towards set of sun. "Westward ho!" seems the natural outcry of weariness and discontent. "You may go to h—ll!" said the stump orator to his constituents, who had failed to re-elect

him for Congress, "and I'll go to Texas!" Something of the same sentiment hardened Gerard's heart when he saw the round of fashion and amusement whirling about him in the gaiety of a London season; that gaiety which, pleasant as it is, seems such a bitter mockery to an empty or an aching heart. Of Texas, indeed, he had heard too much to make it his refuge, but for a very few thousand pounds he bought a great many thousand acres in the neighbourhood of Buenos Ayres, and thither he resolved to betake himself forthwith, fitting out for the purpose a goodly barque of considerable tonnage, which he proposed to command as captain and sailing-master, lading her with a cargo of "notions" that could not fail to make handsome profits, and selecting with great care a crew of honest, able-bodied "salts," such as it would be a pride and a pleasure to employ. "If anything can take the nonsense out of a fellow," thought Gerard, "it will be such a trip as this. Constant work, heavy responsibility, lots of foul weather, and then a bad bargain to make the best of, a life in the open air, and a score of half-broken horses to gallop about a farm of fifty thousand acres!"

To this end he proceeded to dispose, by sale and

gift, of the necessary articles constituting a bachelor's establishment in London. Two or three pictures, several boxes of cigars, a self-adjusting filter, the Racing Calendar complete, two bull-terriers, a piping bullfinch, a mail phaeton, a circular brougham, several valuable canes, a harmonium, and a stud of hunters.

It was pleasant for Mrs. Vandeleur, reading the *Morning Post* at breakfast, to come on such an advertisement as this, from the pen of Messrs. Tattersall,—

"To be sold without reserve, as the owner is about to leave England, the following horses well known in Leicestershire, the property of Gerard Ainslie, Esq.," succeeded by a string of high-sounding appellations dwindling at last to "Jack and Gill, quiet in harness, and have been constantly driven together," and concluded by "Norah Creina, a favourite hack."

"He might have kept *her*," thought Mrs. Vandeleur, "if only for the name!" but her eyes filled with tears, and to swallow them did not improve her appetite for breakfast.

Their joint sorrow was unequally divided, the woman as usual having the larger share. Gerard

sought relief in sheer hard work of mind and body. To a certain extent he found it. A long day passed at the docks, carefully overlooking fittings and repairs for his ship; a dozen interviews with different merchants, all men of the strictest probity, but with whom it was "business" to get the better of him if he neglected to keep his eyes open; a hunt through Wapping and its purlieus, after, here a boatswain's mate, and there a ship's carpenter, with unceasing research for top-men, smart but not "cheeky," knowing their duty yet not wholly given over to drink;—these varied labours would sometimes tire him so completely that after an hour's smoking he was glad to go to sleep in his chair, only leaving it to toss and tumble through a wakeful night in bed.

Then, mistaking fatigue of body for peace of mind, he would vote himself cured of his infatuation, and to prove it, even changed the barque's name, substituting for her humble appellation of the Simple Susan, a more suggestive title as the White Rose.

He "pitied himself," as the French say, very deeply, and this form of sympathy is not without a spurious consolation of its own. His friends, too, afforded him the usual commiseration, vaguely

wondering why they saw him so seldom, but accepting the loss of his society with resignation, and troubling themselves not at all about its cause. Dolly, entering the club he most affected, about five o'clock in the afternoon, found a knot of intimates thus bewailing the absentee.

"Has Ainslie got any sound horses amongst those wretches I saw to-day at Tattersall's? I want two or three hunters if I can get my sort. Anybody know anything about any of them?"

The speaker was a stout florid young man who looked rich, stupid, and good-natured. He loved hunting very dearly, was extremely well mounted, very particular that his horses should be safe fencers, and equally careful only to ride them at safe places. As his friend and toady, Mr. Agincourt, commonly called Blueskin, was wont to observe, "It seemed a good system, making the odds two to one in his favour."

That gentleman laid down the *Globe* and rose from his chair. "There's one you ought to buy," said he dictatorially, for he understood his profession and smoothed a patron's plumage from the higher standing point, "the chestnut with a thin tail, 'Bobstay' they call him in the list. I saw him go last season

from Gumley Wood to the Caldwell, right across the Langtons, and he never put a foot wrong! I don't believe there's such another fencer in England. Old Fly-by-night gave me two falls following him in and out of the Harborough road. The distance isn't much, but I'll trouble you for the 'oxers.' No horse that can go straight in that country should slip through your fingers. I shall be at Tattersall's at any rate, and I'll bid for him if you like."

"I suppose Ainslie don't ride much," observed the other, a gratuitous assumption enthusiastically repudiated by young Lord Rasperdale.

"Ride, Jerry!" exclaimed that outspoken nobleman, "I should just like to see you bound to follow him. Why he beat every man-jack of us last March on a thorough-bred horse he calls Lucifer—the beggar they returned so often as unrideable—in that good run from 'John-o'-Gaunt.' There were only three fellows out of Melton got to the end, and I wasn't one of them, but he was. Ride, indeed! the only fault I can find in his riding is that he's a turn too hard!"

"The more fool he," replied the imperturbable Jerry. "Then, Blueskin, I think you and I will just pop in presently, and have a look at Bobstay.

But why is he sending them up? Is it a *bonâ fide* sale, or does he only want to get rid of the drafts?"

"Don't you know?" observed an elderly smoke-dried man from the writing-table. "Do you mean to say you haven't heard? This Mr. Ainslie is but a man of straw after all. What you young fellows call 'a chalk' performer. I don't believe he ever had a shilling more than two thousand a-year, and he's been living as if he'd twenty. Good fun, I dare say, while it lasted! but result—smash! Everything's to be sold—pianofortes, guinea-fowls, carriages, villa at Teddington, yacht at Cowes; in short, the whole plant. Jerry needn't alarm himself about the horses. Take my word for it they're not to be bought in, if they go for five pounds a piece!"

"I think you're mistaken about the money," said Mr. Agincourt. "I've always understood he succeeded to a large fortune, but it was all in Blight's bank; and when that broke, our friend 'went his mucker' with the others, and we shall never see him here again."

"I'll take ten to one about that," interposed a young guardsman, solacing himself with a chicken sandwich and dry sherry. "I don't believe he'd money in Blight's bank any more than I have in

Cox's! No, it's that American woman who has cleaned out Ainslie. What's her name? This new actress coming out at the Accordion. Here's a fellow who'll tell us all about it. Dolly, what's the name of your new star that you make such a row about; and why did you let her have a run at Ainslie first, instead of the other Jerry here, who's twice as big a fool with twice as big a fortune?"

"He's not a fool. He's not ruined. He's no more to do with Madame Molinara than you have," answered Dolly, honestly enough, and standing up as usual for his friend. "Why a fellow can't sell his horses, and go abroad for a lark, without everybody swearing he's a blackguard and a sharper, is one of those scandals which beat me altogether, I confess. Ainslie's got six thousand a year if he has a penny, and I don't believe he ever spoke to my new actress in his life!"

"Bravo, manager!" shouted half-a-dozen voices. "That's right, Dolly. Stick up for the shop! You only say so to defend the respectability of your theatre!"

Like a baited bull, Dolly turned from one to another of his tormentors.

"Ask Burton," said he, pointing to the latter,

who had been sitting silent in a corner, behind the evening paper; "he knows all about him. Ask the Dandy, if you don't believe me."

That gentleman pointed to his forehead. "Quite true," he replied, with a gentle smile of commiseration. "I have known poor Ainslie from a boy. He was always very queer. Not mad exactly; at least, not mad enough to be shut up; but subject to fits of flightiness, you know, and alarmingly violent at times. It is best to get him abroad during these attacks, and I'm glad he is going. Poor fellow! it's very sad for himself and very painful to his friends."

As usual, not for ten men who heard the slander, did one listen to its contradiction—Dolly's indignant protest being lost in the uprising of the conclave to go and talk the whole thing over again, a mile and a half off, in the Park.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOLD OUT.

The Dandy was not mad, far from it, and nobody would have attributed *his* ruin to anything like want of caution or care for number one. Nevertheless, he was at this very period in the last stage of undeclared bankruptcy, having arrived at that hopeless point so touchingly described in the well-known parody (perhaps the best of its kind ever written) on Locksley Hall:—

> "Credit shook the glass of Time, and dribbled out the golden sand,
> Every day became more valueless my frequent note of hand."

Mr. Burton, to use an expression of the money-market, had "a good deal of paper out." Little of it, I fear, was of greater value than that which is

made into tags for the tail of a kite. Certain of the tribe of Judah had already refused to look at it. They declared it "wouldn't wash,"—an objection one would hardly have expected gentlemen of their appearance to entertain. His own Christian man of business, a respectable solicitor, had long ago given him up as a bad job. "Your position, my good sir," said that sagacious person, "is beset with difficulties. I scarcely know what to advise; but, under all circumstances, the closest retrenchment is indispensable!"

Now "the closest retrenchment" was exactly that form of amendment to which the Dandy was most averse. In his eyes, any other way of escape seemed preferable. His habits were formed now, and those indulgences, which once afforded him such keen gratification as superfluities of luxury, had become daily necessities of life. It is not your thoughtless, reckless, devil-may-care spendthrift, who walks through his thousands, few or many, in a couple of London seasons and a winter at Rome, that feels the real pressure of poverty when his last hundred has vanished after the rest. No; these graceless spirits are usually endowed with considerable energy, faultless digestions, and marvellous powers of enjoy-

ment. The Lord Mayor, or the Pope, or somebody, gives them a lift when they least expect it; they turn their hands to work with as keen a zest as once they did to play, and find as much fun in five shillings as they used to extract from five pounds. Such men often end by building up a fortune ten times as large as the one they kicked down. But the selfish, cold-blooded sensualist, the drone that loves the honey for its own sake, and thinks by superior cunning to over-reach the bees; the man of pleasure, who draws from every sovereign its twenty shillings'-worth of gratification, neither throwing away nor giving away a farthing, who calculates extravagance as others do economy, and deliberately weighs the present indulgence against the coming crash, undeterred by the consciousness that pre-arranged insolvency is neither more nor less than swindling, he it is who discovers, to his cost, when money and credit are both gone, they have taken with them everything that makes life worth having, and left nothing in their place but a broken constitution, an enfeebled mind, a nerveless arm, and a diabolical temper. Such are the results of systematic pleasure-seeking, and for such ailments friends advise and doctors prescribe in vain.

This deplorable state Dandy Burton, notwith-

standing his enviable start in life, bade fair to reach at last. Latterly, as he told himself with bitter emphasis, for he confided in none else, everything had gone against him. His winnings on the Turf had been invested at high interest in a foreign railway, which must have paid admirably had it ever been constructed on anything but an engineer's plan. To meet his losses he had been compelled to borrow of the Jews. He bought a share in the best two-year-old of its own, or perhaps any other year, and in this transaction showed his usual judgment; but the two-year-old broke its leg at exercise, and no amount of care or forethought could have prevented the catastrophe. A farm he sold realised less than was anticipated. A great-aunt, from whom he expected an opportune legacy, died suddenly, and "cut up," as he expressed it, far worse than anybody would have supposed. Then came powers of attorney, calling in of balances, mortgaging of acres, and sale of reversions. Lastly, bills drawn, accepted, renewed: and so the clouds seemed to gather from each quarter of the heavens, ready to burst in a thunderstorm over his head.

And all the time he had not the heart to forego the vainest pleasure, the resolution to give up the

smallest luxury. He must keep his brougham, of course—no fellow could do without his brougham; and the tea-cart—every fellow had a tea-cart; also, it was impossible for the same animal to go in both. Putting down the saddle-horses would be simply to advertise his ruin, and bring the Philistines on him at once. A stall at each opera-house seemed a positive economy, for where else could he pass the evening without spending more money? The same argument held good regarding his share in the omnibus-box. Poole he didn't pay of course, that great and good man never expected it; while bills for gloves, books, eau-de-Cologne, and such small personalties, were liquidated by fresh orders easily enough. He often considered the subject, and as often came to the conclusion that his habits were really regulated with due regard to economy, and there was no direction in which he could retrench. To leave off attending races would certainly save a few paltry "fivers" in railway fares; but then was it wise to lose the experience of a life-time, and miss, perhaps, the one good thing that to pull off would put matters again almost on the square? He certainly belonged to too many clubs, but out of which should he take his name for the sake of the miserable

ten-pound subscription he had paid his entrance-money on purpose to defray? One was the only place in London where "fellows" were to be met with between four and five p.m. It would be a pity to leave another till that '34 claret was drunk out. At a third a man might ask a friend to dinner; at a fourth, play whist for hundred-pound points, if he fancied it; at a fifth, smoke cigars in an atmosphere you could cut with a knife during any hour of the twenty-four; whilst a sixth boasted the unspeakable advantage that its members comprised all the stars of the literary world, though none of them ever seemed to go near it by day or night. Obviously, nothing in the way of retrenchment could be done as regarded clubs. Then his daily life, he argued, his own personal habits, were of the simplest and most ascetic. Chocolate was the only thing he ever could drink for breakfast, and it could surely be no fault of his that cigars were not to be bought fit to smoke under seventy shillings a pound. Turkish baths every day came cheaper than visits from a doctor, and nothing but those searching sudorifics enabled him to drink dry champagne, the only wine that really agreed with him now. He might save a ten-pound note, perhaps, on the whole year, by

dismissing Brown, to whom he paid unusually high wages; but then Brown saved him a fortune, he always reckoned, in many valuable receipts for varnish, hair-oil, shaving-soap, and such articles of the toilet; while his system of never settling the valet's book till it rose to a hundred pounds, and then writing a cheque for the amount, spared him an infinity of trouble, and seemed a wise financial transaction enough. Brown, too, was an invaluable servant in so many ways. Everybody wanted to engage a Brown. He knew the addresses of all his master's friends, the post-towns of every country-house they frequented, the stations at which fast trains stopped, and those where post-horses were not to be procured. Arriving late at his Grace's, or my Lord's, or the Squire's, in five minutes dressing-things were laid out as if by magic—bath ready, towels aired, letters inquired for, all necessary information as to hours, habits, and guests, respectfully reported; while, however early a start might be made next morning, leathers appeared spotless, and guns oiled, as if Brown sat up all night. He could guess from the proposed "beat" what number of cartridges were likely to be shot away before luncheon; and not another valet in Europe but

Brown could tell whether a frost was too hard for hunting. It was a mystery how he found time to make acquaintance with all the ladies'-maids, and through them to learn so much about the doings of their mistresses.

An invaluable servant, thought Burton—so quick, so quiet, so respectful, so trustworthy, such a good manner, and, above all, so devoted to his master's interests. No; he could not afford to part with Brown!

So the Dandy wrote one or two letters which, notwithstanding his high opinion of the valet's fidelity, he resolved to post with his own hands; and dressing scrupulously, as usual, sauntered off to his club.

Mr. Brown laid out his master's evening's clothes, shook, brushed, and folded those lately taken off, removed every speck from his own irreproachable costume, and proceeded to the house of call he most affected, where he ordered a glass of cold brandy-and-water, not too strong, with which he diluted the perusal of *Bell's Life*, not omitting to study the odds for a great race, on which many a nobleman would have liked to make as good a book as Mr. Brown's.

His occupation was interrupted by a showily-dressed, flash-looking individual, with dark eyes, a good deal of whisker, and a red face, who accosted him with great cordiality, and a pressing invitation to drink, calling for a bottle of champagne on the spot, which was promptly placed before them, both gentlemen preferring that pleasant wine out of ice.

"Mr. Jacobs," said the valet in his usual staid tones, "here's your good health. You're looking well, sir, and I'm glad to see our horse holds his own in the betting, though Tim telegraphs as he's done our commission this morning at Liverpool."

Mr. Jacobs leered with his fine eyes, and smiled with his ugly mouth. "Here's luck!" said he. "We've pulled together in this here business strong, Mr. Brown, and it's the best thing as I've been in since Corkscrew's year. It's not half so good a game as it was then. There's plenty of flats left," he added in a voice of plaintive regret; "but the flats knows they is flats now. Ah! it's a great pity, it is. While as for the young ones—why there's never such a thing. It seems to me in these days they're all born with their wisdom-teeth cut, and their whiskers growed."

Mr. Brown made no answer. His own wisdom-

teeth had been through the gums many a long year, and kept his tongue habitually in their custody. The other, filling both glasses, proceeded more cheerfully, "We might do a good stroke of business, you and me, Mr. Brown, suppose we worked together regular with nothing to interfere. Why, as I was a-saying to 'Nobby' only last night at this here table, a man of your form is quite thrown away in such a profession as yours. There ain't no scope for you; not what I calls elbow-room. 'It's downright foolery,' says Nobby. 'I wonder as Brown ain't sick and tired of it, and that's the truth!'"

"I have some thoughts of retiring," answered Mr. Brown, who had indeed made his mind up long ago as to the course he should adopt, and was only here now for what he could get. "My 'ealth isn't quite what it used to be, and change of hair at the different meetings always does me a world of good. We might work it, as you say, Mr. Jacobs, you and me. We can depend on one another, can't us?"

The dark eyes shot an eager glance in the speaker's face. "Then he is going!" exclaimed Mr. Jacobs, emptying his glass at a gulp. "I'm a straightforward chap, I am, and I never has no secrets from a pal. There isn't another man in the

ring what I call so fair and above-board as yours truly. Now I tell you what it is, Brown. I've calculated your 'boss' to a day—I may say to an hour. I never gave him longer than the week after next. If he goes a minute sooner you'll tip me the office, won't you now? Honour!"

He pulled a note-case from his breast-pocket, and thrust a crumpled piece of thin suggestive paper into Mr. Brown's unresisting hand. That worthy never moved a muscle of his countenance.

"He bought a foreign Bradshaw," said he, "the day before yesterday. Mr. Poole, he sent in a lot of new clothes last night. There's been three gentlemen and a horse-dealer to look at our hacks. More than that, he's posted five letters in the last two days himself. I'm sure of it, for I keep count of the envelopes in his writing-case, and there's the same number of postage-stamps missing. I shall know, never fear, if he means bolting; and you can trust me as if it was yourself. No, I won't have a another bottle, thank ye, Mr. Jacobs. I'm going out to tea directly. If there's anything fresh to-morrow, I'll drop you a line by post."

So Mr. Brown walked leisurely off to his tea-party, and thence proceeded home to superintend

his master's dinner-toilet, affording him the usual assistance in his own quiet unobtrusive manner, with as much tact and forethought as if he had no other study on earth, nor intended to apply himself to anything else while he lived. The Dandy, dressing early and somewhat in haste for a club-dinner, reflected how impossible it would be to do without such a servant, and even pondered on the wisdom of confiding to his faithful valet the secret of his ruin, to afford him the option of accompanying his master at a lower rate of wages into exile.

CHAPTER XVII.

"FOR AULD LANG SYNE."

If Gerard Ainslie, disgusted with life in general, and the White Rose in particular, took but little interest in his own play, now on the eve of representation, so culpable an indifference could not be said to extend to manager, actors, or subordinates of the Accordion Theatre. The bills stated no more than the truth when they affirmed that scenery, dresses, decorations, &c., were all new. Full rehearsals had rendered the players exceedingly perfect in their parts, and although much dissatisfaction was expressed at a certain want of fire in the dialogue, not a word could be said in disparagement of the gorgeous costumes that decorated the very supernumeraries in such scenes as the Pope's universal benediction, or the Grand Chorus

(upwards of a hundred voices) in front of the Cardinal's Palace. An illustrative piece of music had also been written on purpose for the melodrama, that is to say, favourite airs from various operas, slightly altered, were tacked together, and played a little faster than usual. Every nerve was strained, every resource of the establishment exhausted to render *Pope Clement, or the Cardinal's Collapse*, what is termed a success, and his whole company seconded their manager's efforts with something more than common professional zeal, something due to the genial character and universal popularity of the man. Madame Molinara had shown herself indeed a little troublesome in occasional absence from rehearsal, and carelessness when there; but nobody who saw her walk across the stage, even by daylight, could doubt she was a thorough artist, and understood the very smallest *minutiæ* of her profession. Dolly could not repress his raptures; much to that young lady's disgust, he even enlarged on the excellencies of his importation in presence of Miss Tregunter.

"She *can* just act above a bit," exclaimed our enthusiastic manager. "If I'd only known of her six months sooner, before they gave her that

exorbitant engagement at New York, she would have made all our fortunes, and I'd have got a *trousseau* of my own—

> "Like other charmers wooing the caress
> More dazzlingly, when daring in full dress.
> I won't go on—the sequel you can guess!"

Miss Tregunter very properly snubbed him no less for the glaring impropriety of his quotation, than the approval he chose to profess, "under her very nose," as she said, "of this detestable Yankee!"

Still, Janey was woman enough to entertain no small amount of curiosity concerning Madame Molinara, and would have been exceedingly unwilling to miss that artist's first appearance. So she dined solemnly by daylight at Mrs. Vandeleur's house, expressly to be in time, but was compelled to forego her lover's attendance because that gentleman had contracted a previous engagement elsewhere.

Nobody in London gave such pleasant little men-dinners as Dandy Burton. Professing keen interest in Gerard's play, he had long since obtained a promise from author and manager to dine early with him on the first night of its performance, that they might see it afterwards in company. He

had reminded Gerard only that morning of his engagement, and the latter had agreed to join the dinner-party at least. Thus much he felt due to his old fellow-pupil, with whom his conscience smote him that he should be unreasonably aggrieved. "I won't throw you over," said he cordially. "I'm off in less than a week, and I don't think I shall ever come to England again." To which the other replied, hypocritically enough, "Good luck to you, my dear fellow, on either side the Atlantic. I trust we shall see you back again before next year's Derby!"

The Dandy having then secured Dolly Egremont's box, made up his party, ordered a little gem of a dinner for four at "The Vertumnus," and felt, now his traps were artfully set and baited, there was nothing more to be done but await the result.

To-night would be his grand *coup*. To-night the appearance on a public stage of Gerard Ainslie's lawful wife could not but fall like a shell amongst the party collected in the manager's box. "Theresa," indeed, and "Cousin Charlie," might escape unwounded; but for Dolly and his future bride, must not such an exposure produce dismay and confusion

of face? For Gerard himself destruction — for Mrs. Vandeleur despair? By that lady's demeanour under the torture he would learn whether a chance existed of his own eventual success. "If not"—he stuck his hands in his pockets, ground an oath between his teeth, and paced across the strangers' room at "The Vertumnus"—"if not, I must make a bolt of it before Jacobs and his partner—whoever he is, d—n him!—know anything about my movements. In the meantime, why don't these fellows come? They made such a point of being early. Waiter! get dinner directly!"

Egremont and Ainslie arrived together; the latter silent, out of spirits, pre-occupied — the former in a state of intense bustle and excitement, looking so like the Dolly of former days on the eve of some holiday-making frolic, that even Burton's worldly heart warmed to him for the moment, and beat during half-a-dozen pulsations with the sanguine, sympathetic cordiality of nineteen.

"What a day for Archer's!" he exclaimed, shaking each guest by the hand. "Dolly, I read victory on your brow; and as for Jerry here, he looks a cross between Shakespeare and Sheridan.

I've nobody to meet you but Tourbillon, and he's always late, so we won't wait a moment."

As if to redeem his character for punctuality, the Count entered while he spoke, smiling, radiant, well-dressed; looking prosperous, wicked, and on exceedingly good terms with himself. The soup, too, made its appearance; and the four men sat down to get the most out of their short hour and a half before they were due at the theatre.

When people meet, either at dinner or elsewhere, expressly to celebrate a particular event, or discuss a particular subject, I have always remarked the conversation drifts about in every other direction, so that the assemblage often breaks up without having in any way furthered the object for which it was convened. On the present occasion, soup and white-bait were discussed without eliciting anything of greater interest than a late Paris scandal from Tourbillon; but after a lobster *rissole* and second glass of champagne the guests became more talkative, and the Frenchman, turning to Gerard, observed, with a meaning air completely lost on the other—

"So you are off again, I understand, to make long voyages, great explorations—to bid farewell

to England, to Europe? My faith! I think you are right."

Now, Gerard's first impulse, like that of any other right-thinking person, had prompted him to leave the room the moment Tourbillon entered it. You can't well sit down to dinner with a man who ran away with your wife, even after many years' interval; neither can you reasonably pick a fresh quarrel with him, the old one having been disposed of, because you have both accepted invitations to the same party. It speaks ill for Gerard's frame of mind that with a moment's reflection he dismissed his first idea, and elected to remain. He was so restless, so unhappy, altogether in so excited a state, that he cared little what might happen next, and even looked forward to the possibility of a row arising out of their juxtaposition, into which he could enter with savage zest.

All this Dandy Burton had calculated to a nicety, when he meditated such a solecism as to place these two men at the same table. Anything that should put Gerard "off his head," as the saying is, before the grand final exposure at the theatre, would count very much in favour of his own manœuvres. He was therefore prepared for

an explosion, and somewhat disappointed at its failure. The Count, it is needless to observe, accepted the situation with his usual good-humoured *sang-froid*, simply addressing Mr. Ainslie as a pleasant acquaintance with whom he was not on very intimate terms.

The latter grew brighter and kindlier under the influence of wine. Even now, in his misery, it rendered him neither morose nor quarrelsome. Something, too, in the absurdity of the whole position struck him as irresistibly comical, and he almost laughed in the Frenchman's face while he replied to his observation. After that, of course, there could be no more question of a quarrel, and they remained perfectly good friends till the dessert.

"I sail this day week," said Gerard, cheerfully. "I've got the best-built, best-fitted, best-found barque between London Docks and Deptford. Won't you take a cruise with me, Count? I'll give you a berth. Will either of you fellows come? It is but a stone's throw across the Atlantic, if you're in anything like a craft; and the climate of South America is the finest in the world. Come, won't you be tempted?"

"Who's to take my book on the Leger?" asked Burton, wishing in his heart he might not be compelled to leave England whether he liked it or not.

"And who is to manage my theatre?" said Dolly, with his mouth full.

"And who is to write plays for it when Monsieur Enslee is gone?" added the Count, bowing courteously over the glass he lifted to his lips.

"Plays!" exclaimed the manager. "After to-night no more plays need be written for the British public. I venture to predict that *Pope Clement*, as I have put it on the stage, will be the great triumph of the season. I tell you I shall be disappointed if it don't run a hundred nights, and go down as good as new into the provinces afterwards."

"Here's success to it!" said Burton. "Give me some champagne. Why, Jerry, who would have thought of your turning out a great dramatic author when we were all at Archer's together! We considered him stupid as a boy, Count, I give you my honour. It only shows how people are deceived."

"Monsieur Enslee has seen a great deal since

those days," observed Tourbillon. "To dramatise them, a man should have exhausted the passions. It is but anatomy, you see, my friends, studied on the nerves and fibres of the surgeon's own body. How painful, yet how interesting!"

"Not the least painful," answered Gerard, laughing; "and to the author, at least, anything but interesting. Only a bore, Count, while he works at it, and a disappointment when it is finished."

"Ah, bore!" replied the Count; "that is an English disease—incurable, irremediable. The philosopher has *migraine*, he has *grippe*, but he knows not what is understood by bore. I think the bore, as you call it, of you authors, is often worn like a pretty woman's veil, to hide the blush of some real feeling that a false shame tells her to suppress."

As far as Ainslie was concerned, the Count's arrow reached its mark. Of interest, indeed, in his own plot, he might have none; but it was false to say there was no pain connected with it. Every line, every word, was more or less associated in his mind with the woman he had loved so long, and whom he had determined to see no more. He wished the play at the devil, wished he had never written it, never thought of it! Wished he was

fairly across the Atlantic, and the next two months were past! Then something smote at his heart, and told him that henceforth there would be a blank in his life. So he emptied his glass, and called for more champagne.

"We must make the best use of our time," said the host, at this juncture, "Dolly is getting fidgety already. He sees an impatient audience, a company without a captain, and a gallery in overt rebellion. Suppose you got drunk, Dolly, and didn't go at all? What would happen?

"The supposition involves an impossibility," answered Egremont, gravely; "but they'd pull the house down—that's what would happen."

"You don't mean it!" replied the other. "What a lark it would be! Waiter, coffee, in five minutes. Just one glass of that old Madeira, and we'll start. I have places, as you know, for you all—Dolly has kindly lent me his box."

"I thank you," said the Count; "I shall enter later. I have taken a stall."

"I don't think I shall go," observed Gerard carelessly, opening his cigar-case.

"Not go!" exclaimed Dolly, in accents of unaffected disappointment.

"Not go!" echoed Burton, beholding, as he thought, the whole fabric he had taken such trouble to erect crumbling to pieces.

"You're sure to make a mess of it the first night," argued Gerard. "Grooves stiff—scenes awry—actors nervous—prompter audible—and fiddles out of tune. Besides, how shall I look if they hiss it off the stage?"

"And how shall I look," expostulated Dolly, "if they call for the author and I can't produce him? They'll pull the house down! My dear fellow, you don't know what it is! Under any circumstances, my theatre seems doomed to destruction this blessed night! Fifty thou—gone! Well, it might have been worse!"

They all laughed, and Ainslie looked inclined to give way.

"You are right," said the Count, who, in the plenitude of his good nature, really wished to spare Gerard the pain in store for him, should he recognise, in the Madame Molinara from whom so much was expected, his runaway wife. "I shall go late. I am not like my friend here, to whom five minutes' delay must cost fifty thousand pounds. Ah! *blagueur!* I shall smoke one cigar; you will stay and

smoke with me. I tell you, my friend, it is better."

Something admonitory, almost dictatorial, in the Count's tone, jarred on the other. Ainslie's frame of mind was that in which men start off at a tangent from anything like advice, resenting it as they would coercion.

"I don't see why," he answered, rather shortly. "I shall have plenty of time to smoke between this and the Accordion. After all, hang it! I ought to stick by the manager. I'm ready, Dolly, if you are. Count Tourbillon, I wish you a good evening." Burton said not a word. The judicious angler knows when to let his fish alone, giving it line, and suffering it to play itself. The Count looked a little surprised, but attributed Gerard's unexpected abruptness to the champagne.

"*Il paraît qu'il a le vin mauvais. C'est égal!*" said he; and, undisturbed by the departure of the others, proceeded to smoke a tranquil cigar in solitude.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MANAGER'S BOX.

The Accordion, from its front row of stalls to the extreme verge of its gallery under the very roof, was one dense mass of faces, all turned eagerly towards the stage. Playgoing people had been subsisting for a long time on musical extravaganzas, of which the extravagance outdid the music; far-fetched burlesques, of little humour and less wit; drowsy readings from Shakespeare; translations ill translated; and adaptations, worse adapted, from the French. The public were hungry for a real, old-fashioned melodrama once more, with love, murder, glittering swords, stage jewellery, frantic dialogue, and appropriate action. They longed to see the stride, the strut, the stop,—a scowling villain, a daring lover,—a Gothic hall, a moon-lit

pass,—above all, an injured heroine, now tearful and dishevelled, with pale face and hollow eyes, despairing at the back; anon, radiant in smiles, white satin, and imitation pearls, exulting before the foot-lights, victorious over insult and oppression, triumphantly to vindicate the first principle of stage morality, that "Beauty can do no wrong."

This starving public then—through the medium of posters, newspaper advertisements, men in cardboard extinguishers, and other modes of legitimate puffing—had been informed that its cravings were at last to be satisfied, in a grand, new, original melodrama called *Pope Clement, or the Cardinal's Collapse*. Critics whispered one another that this was none of your foreign plagiarisms, altered only in costume and language, but a real novelty—startling of action, replete with incident, and—well—yes, it had been pruned to a certain extent, for in these days, you understand, an author cannot be too careful. But, although the moral was doubtless unimpeachable, some of the situations might seem, perhaps, to an English audience, a little—what shall we say?—unusual, but nothing the least indelicate—far from it. Can we wonder

that the famished public rushed incontinently to their meal?

Dolly Egremont, too, who had learned his trade by this time pretty perfectly, kept up the right amount of mystery regarding his American actress, identifying her skilfully enough with the new melodrama in which she was to appear. He also told several friends, under promise of inviolable secrecy —a manner of advertising only second to the columns of the *Times*—that this much-talked-of piece was the production of their acquaintance, Gerard Ainslie, who, from feelings of modesty, did not wish his name to be made known; that it was by far the best thing out for many years; that even the actors at rehearsal could not forbear their applause; that the dresses had cost him three times as much as dresses ever cost a treasury before; and that soft music would play continuously throughout the whole action of the piece.

A thrilling drama—a new actress—a dandy playwright—and a liberal manager! What more could be desired?

The bait took, the public were tempted, and the house filled. Dolly Egremont, peeping through a hole in the curtain, positively shook with mingled

nervousness and delight while he scanned the overflow, and reflected that his check-takers were still driving supplicants away unsatisfied from the doors.

There was one part of the house, however, on which the roving eye of cupidity, even in a manager, could linger without counting profits or returns. For a few seconds it rested on his own box, and Dolly Egremont forgot that the world or the theatre contained an object besides Jane Tregunter, dressed in pink—a colour which to other eyes than a lover's might have appeared a little too bright for her complexion, a little too juvenile for her years.

It is with that box we also have to do. Let us imagine ourselves impalpable, invisible, jammed into a corner under the peg on which the White Rose has hung up her bernouse. She has taken a place in front, furthest removed from the stage; perhaps because there is a nook behind it containing the worst seat in the box, and likely therefore to remain vacant the longest. No chance is so minute as to be neglected in a woman's calculations. Mrs. Vandeleur looks very pale, and her manner is more restless than usual, while the gloved hand that holds her opera-glasses would shake ridiculously but for her

clenching it so tight. All the party have not yet arrived. Cousin Charlie indeed, an ensign in the Guards, has made his appearance, and already told them the whole plot and history of the play, with comments of his own, facetious, not to say disrespectful; for Charlie, like many of his kind, possesses unflagging spirits, any amount of that self-reliant quality which the rising generation call "cheek," imperturbable good-humour, very little sympathy with anything or anybody, and no faculty of veneration whatever. "Theresa," ten years older than himself—which, after all, scarcely makes her thirty—takes him up, as she calls it, and pets him considerably; laughing at his nonsense while encouraging his impertinence, treating him with a regard almost as demonstrative as she shows towards her bullfinch, and with about as much respect as she entertains for her poodle!

Miss Tregunter, because she disapproves of Dolly's connection with the Accordion, superintends the whole ceremony, as it were, under protest, yet cannot but feel a certain accession of dignity in her own position, and has never perhaps looked on theatrical matters with so indulgent an eye as to-night.

Cousin Charlie disappears to return with half-a-dozen playbills, which he distributes not without buffoonery, venturing even to address a far-fetched witticism to Norah, but recoiling a good deal chilled from the cold, absent expression of that lady's face, who has not indeed heard a syllable, to take refuge with Theresa, and whisper in her willing ear that "Mrs. V. has got her back up about something, and he can guess why, but he isn't going to say."

The orchestra strikes up. A child in the gallery begins to cry; its removal in such a crowd is no more possible than to take away the great glittering chandelier from the middle of the roof, An unfeeling joker suggests, "Throw it over!" The audience cry, "Hush!" "Silence!" "Order!" Fainter and fainter the fiddles die off; the music sinks and swells, and sinks again, into harmony such as an imaginative mind, predisposed by the playbills, might fancy the resemblance of a morning breeze; and with a fresh burst, which Norah, preoccupied as she is, thinks not unlike something she has heard long ago in David's symphony of *The Desert*, the curtain rises on a "Sunrise in the Campagna"—wide plains, distant mountains, classic ruins, white

oxen, flat-capped women, peasants cross-gartered, garlands, grapes, and garnishing all complete.

The scene reflects great credit on the stage-carpenters. The audience, prepared to be pleased, applaud loudly. Norah's thoughts have travelled back, Heaven knows why, to the marshes about Ripley, and the box-door opening, with considerable bustle, announces a fresh arrival. By no small effort she concentrates her whole attention on the play.

She has quite lost the clue to its opening, nevertheless. Already the peasants have dispersed; the scene has changed to a street in Rome, where a "typically-developed" monk, with round stomach and red nose, is accepting a purse of zecchins—ringing and chinking with a rich luxuriance money never seems to possess in real life—from "a gallant" (no other word expresses the character), wearing a black mask, long boots, a wide hat, a drooping feather, an ample cloak, and huge spurs that jingle as he walks.

Mrs. Vandeleur's ear, quickened by anxiety, recognises a man's heavier tread close behind her. Pooh! it's only Mr. Burton! She turns to shake hands with him civilly and even cordially. What does it matter? What does anything matter

now? The Dandy's manner is perfect of its kind —guarded, conventional, the least thing penitent; interested, yet exceedingly respectful.

"Thank you so much for coming," is all he says, and proceeds, gracefully enough, to pay his respects to the other ladies in the box. Heavy and sore at heart, Norah turns her face once more towards the stage.

"You must listen to this," observes Burton, for the general benefit; "it's almost the best thing in the play. I'm so glad we're in time. I know Dolly's on tenter-hooks now. He would never have forgiven us if we had missed it."

By twos, and fours, and sixes, the manager's whole force, supernumeraries and all, are trooping on the stage. Great masses of red and white group themselves artistically in the old Roman street, over which a judicious arrangement of gas sheds all the warmth and glare of real Italian sunshine. It is impossible to detect where the human figures end and the painted crowd begins. Deeper and deeper that gorgeous phalanx gathers, and still, by a waving movement never discontinued, the effect is gained of an ever-increasing multitude massed together in the streets and squares of a city. Pro-

cessions of white-robed priests and acolytes wind in stately measure through the midst; censers are swinging, choristers chanting, waving banners and massive croziers are borne to the front. It is the great scenic triumph of the play, and a burst of grand music appropriately heralds its exhibition to the audience. While she looks and listens, Norah's heart seems very full; but a quiet sensation of repose steals over her, and she attributes it, perhaps, to the influence of those exalted strains, rather than to an instinctive consciousness of the presence of him whom she still so dearly loves.

His sleeve just touches her shoulder as he slides into that vacant seat in the dark corner which nobody has thought it worth while to occupy. He has come in very quietly after Burton, and the attention of the whole party being riveted on the stage, his arrival remains unnoticed. How is it that Norah knows Gerard Ainslie is within a foot of her before she dare turn her face to look—that face no longer pale, but blushing crimson to the temples? He does not see it. He sees nothing but a dazzling vision of lavender and black lace and grey gloves, and a white flower nestling in coils of golden chestnut hair; but he is conscious that the

blood is rushing wildly to his own brow, and his heart aches with a keen thrilling sensation of delight, utterly unreasonable, and actually painful in its intensity.

Author as he is too—the first night of his play and all—yet has he quite forgotten drama, theatre, actors, the manager's anxiety, his own literary fame, and the ostensible reason for his being there. This is no imaginary sorrow, that must henceforth darken all his future; no fictitious passion that has endured through his whole past; that still so completely enslaves him, he is trembling with a mad causeless happiness even now.

Their whispered greeting was of the coldest, the most commonplace, but something in the tone of each struck the same chord, called forth the same feeling. Their eyes met, and in an instant Norah slid her hand in his, while both felt that in spite of doubt, anxiety, alienation, so much that had seemed harsh, unjust, inexplicable, their true feelings remained unchanged, unchangeable.

Mrs. Vandeleur dared not trust her voice, and Gerard was the first to speak. His face looked very sad, and his tone, though kindly, was sorrowful in the extreme.

"I am so glad to have seen you again to-night. But I should not—I could not have sailed without wishing you good-bye."

"Sailed!" she gasped. "Good-bye! What do you mean? Where are you going, and when?"

"To South America," he answered, simply. "We shall be at sea in less than a week."

All this in a low subdued voice, but they could have spoken out loud had they pleased, for burst after burst of applause now shook the very walls of the theatre, and excited spectators waving fans, handkerchiefs, opera-glasses, rose tumultuously in their places, to welcome the great American actress, at this moment making her first appearance before a British public.

From his ill-contrived corner Gerard could see so little of the performance that he might indeed have left the box without further enlightenment, but that Mrs. Vandeleur, hurt, confused, dismayed, could think of nothing better than to make room for him, and direct his attention to the stage.

The scene, representing the confessional of a cathedral, left nothing to be desired in architectural grandeur and florid decoration. Madame Molinara,

as Violante, about to relieve her conscience from a heavy list of theatrical sins, came forward with peculiar dignity of gait and gesture, enveloped from head to foot in a long white veil. Even Mrs. Vandeleur could not have recognised her under its folds. Gerard applauded like the rest, and observed to his companion, "You can see she is an actress by the way she walks across the stage!"

Round after round, the well-trained artist sustained that deafening applause without being tempted to destroy the illusion of the piece by abandoning her dramatic character; but at length the enthusiasm reached such a height, that to delay its acknowledgment would have seemed alike uncourteous and ungrateful. The star came forward to the footlights, raised her veil, and executed a curtsey to the very ground.

Then, indeed, the excitement became a tumult. A storm of bouquets burst upon the stage, besides one that fell short of its mark, and only reached the big drum in the orchestra. Shouts of "*brava!*" resounded from pit and boxes, while repeated calls on the band to strike up "Yankee-Doodle" pealed from the gallery; but through it all there came to Norah's ear a hoarse whisper, as of one in extremity

of pain, and every syllable smote like a knell upon her heart.

"Believe me," it said, "I did not know of this. You must feel I could never have so insulted you. It is well I am to leave England. My own—my only love—may God in heaven bless you. We shall never meet again!"

And this while Cousin Charlie and Theresa and the others, three feet off, were laughing and jesting and criticising the new actress: her eyes, her arms, her ankles, the depth of her curtsey, and the general turn of her draperies.

Norah heard the box-door shut, and then lights, audience, stage, pit, boxes, all seemed to swim before her eyes.

"Mr. Burton," said she, in a faint voice, putting out her hand, with that helpless gesture of entreaty peculiar to the blind, "will you take me out? I desired my carriage to wait. Would you mind asking for it? The gas or something makes me feel ill." And so, rejecting every kindly offer of assistance and companionship pressed on her by Theresa and Miss Tregunter, Norah left the box, and descended the private staircase of the theatre, arm-in-

arm with the man she most disliked in London, conscious only that she was vaguely grateful to somebody, it mattered not to whom, for the relief it afforded her to get away.

CHAPTER XIX.

EXIT.

For the convenience of its manager, the Accordion possessed a private door, opening on a quiet narrow street, and here Mrs. Vandeleur's carriage was found in waiting according to orders. The fresh air revived its mistress almost immediately. She implored Burton to rejoin his party without delay, a request that gentleman had the good taste to accord at once, congratulating himself, it must be admitted, that so far at least his scheme had been tolerably successful.

Returning to the box, he found Gerard Ainslie too had vanished. Nobody else was sufficiently anxious about Mrs. Vandeleur to press him with further questions, when he observed quietly, "She was suffering from a bad headache, so he had packed

her up in her carriage and sent her home." In truth, these, like the rest of the spectators, could spare attention for nothing but the all-engrossing business of the stage.

The long-drawn aisles of its scenic cathedral had been darkened so skilfully, as to convey an idea of dim religious grandeur, and vast architectural space. A few wax-tapers twinkled through the gloom. Violante, her white veil fallen from her brow, her black hair dishevelled on her shoulders, knelt with clasped hands and wild imploring eyes before the love-stricken Cardinal, while enumerating the catalogue of her sins. It was to the credit of our old friend Mr. Bruff,—we beg his pardon, Mr. Barrington Belgrave,—that although he recognised her at rehearsal, he had respected the incognita of his former pupil. It was also to his credit that on the present occasion he abstained from his customary rant. The tones of repressed passion in which he addressed her as "my daughter," the shiver, admirably controlled, that shook him from head to heel, when she besought his blessing, must have elicited its meed of applause, then and there, but for the invincible attraction of the penitent herself. Those low tones of hers, from which intense power of

histrionic genius had purged all provincialism of expression or accent, vibrated to every heart; and many an eye was wet with tears, while the whisper —for it was scarcely more than a whisper—thrilled through the whole house, that told how the beautiful Italian struggled with her sin, and her despair.

> "So when entreaty comes,
> Not like an angel, all in robes of light,
> Nor hero nodding from a golden car;
> But earthly-troubled, weary, worn, and sad,
> Yet for defeat the prouder;—and the eyes,
> The haunting eyes, draw tears from out my heart,
> Pleading an endless, hopeless, wordless grief;
> Must I not pity, Father?"

Well, it is not with her we have to do, with the successful actress in the crowded, lighted theatre, holding hundreds entranced by the recital of her fictitious woes. No. It is with the lonely suffering woman outside in the dark deserted street, pressing her temples hard against the cushions of her carriage, weeping bitter tears in her solitude, yet not so bitter as to flow unmingled with a spring of consolation in the thought that, now as ever, for good and evil, in spite of all that had come and gone, through shame, sorrow, and separation, her image was still cherished, still worshipped, still beloved!

Yes, it was impossible to mistake those tones of passionate, heart-felt despair in which he bade her farewell. Not the most consummate power of acting, not his own wife's, could have feigned the quiet weariness of desolation that spoke in every one of those half-dozen words. Her tears flowed faster while she recalled their tender, unreproachful sadness, their meek, undying love, and brain grew clearer, heart stouter, as she wept on. He should not part like this! No, not if she waited in that dismal street all night! Of womanly reserve, and womanly pride, the White Rose cherished more than her share. To a presuming suitor none could, nor would, have dealt a shrewder rebuff; but here was an emergency in which, to the false shame of a moment, might be sacrificed the repose—more, the very purpose of a lifetime. She must go mad, she felt, if he went away without her seeing him again, to ask what had happened? how she had offended him? why this change had grown up between them? and to tell him that, though she was well satisfied to lose him for ever, because of justice and right, nothing here, nor hereafter — no, not a hundred wives—should drive him from the place he had always held (yes, always! though she had

been so cruelly false to him), and always should hold in her heart.

After that, she thought, it would be much easier to give him up, and perhaps in time this woman would amend, and make him a devoted wife.

Far off in the future might be a life of success, usefulness, and even domestic comfort, for Gerard; while, for herself!—well, it mattered little what became of her. She was no Roman Catholic, or the refuge would have occurred to her of a cloister. At present poor Norah felt as if she could never be at rest but in the tomb.

Meanwhile she waited on, watching the door from which she expected Gerard every moment to emerge. And, though while she so eagerly desired it, she half dreaded the interview as positively their last, time lengthened itself out till she began to feel growing on her senses the unrealised horror, the vague apprehension of a dream.

Suddenly, with a start, she thrust her delicate, bare head from the carriage-window, and observed that a couple of foot-passengers had stopped midway in the crossing at the end of the street. Their faces looked very pale under a glare of gaslight; their attitudes expressed curiosity and consternation.

Great-coated policemen, too, hurried rapidly past, vouchsafing no answer to the eager inquiries poured on them. Presently the trampling of many footsteps rained along the adjacent street, and smothered, scuffling noises came from the theatre itself. Then, even ere Norah could frame the idea suddenly presented to her mind, it was substantiated by that thrilling cry which, more than any other alarm, seems to paralyse the boldest hearts, habituated to every other extremity of danger. "Fire! fire!" was shouted, loud and clear. She could not be mistaken; she was sure of it before the startling words had been taken up and re-echoed by a hundred voices. Listening with strained, horror-stricken attention, Norah could hear a suppressed stir and bustle inside the theatre, rising to wild, tumultuous confusion, and subsiding again as quickly in an unaccountable calm, while over all arose long, swelling bursts of harmony from the grand, majestic music of the March in *Faust*.

Robert Smart, in attendance on his mistress, turned a very white, helpless face towards the carriage-window, and it is possible that at this juncture may have dawned on him some vague intention of going to inquire what had happened.

If so, it was put to immediate flight by the appearance, at the manager's door, of the manager himself, pale as death, haggard, disordered, trembling all over, yet preserving that presence of mind which seldom deserts those who are accustomed to trust in their own resources and to act for themselves. His hair, whiskers, and eyelashes were singed, his gloves and dress discoloured, scorched, and smelling strongly of fire; about him, too, there clung a faint, fearful odour as of roasted flesh. Utterly aghast though he looked, into his eyes came a gleam of satisfaction when they rested on the carriage. "How providential!" he exclaimed. "Mrs. Vandeleur, a frightful accident has happened. They are bringing it out here."

It! was there no hope then? Her heart stopped beating while he spoke; but she leapt out unhesitating, and intimated to him—more in dumb show than words—that her carriage should be at his and the sufferer's disposal. Ere he could thank her, Gerard Ainslie, Mr. Bruff and two more actors—these three still in the costumes of the parts they had been playing—moved heavily and carefully through the doorway, bearing amongst them, covered over with a cloak, a shapeless bundle of

rags, shreds, stage jewellery, and human suffering, that had been a beautiful woman and a consummate actress but ten minutes ago!

Making room for these on the pavement, Mrs. Vandeleur was touched by Gerard's shoulder as he passed. She did not yet understand the catastrophe, though it was a relief to learn that he, at least, seemed safe. "Who is it?" she asked; and even at such a time the well-known voice caused him to turn his head. "It is my wife," he answered, and she found herself thinking she had never heard him speak in that strange, hoarse tone before. "Gerard," she whispered very softly, and laid her hand unconsciously on his shoulder; "every moment is precious! Take her home at once to my house."

A doctor was already in attendance. He and Gerard lifted the poor actress, now moaning feebly in extremity of pain, into the carriage, while Norah —roused to all her natural energy under pressure of emergency—hailed a passing Hansom, wound herself into it just as she was, with bare head and evening dress, to dash home and get everything ready, only pausing an instant for the despatch of Robert Smart, who recovered his wits

slowly, in another direction, to secure fresh advice and more assistance.

So poor Fanny was carried helplessly off to the very house of all others in London which, perhaps, she would have been most loth to enter of her own free will, and Gerard Ainslie found himself, under a new and frightful complication of circumstances, crossing once more that well-known threshold, at which he had thought to lay down, once for all, every hope of happiness he had cherished upon earth.

CHAPTER XX.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

Day after day poor Fanny lingered on, suffering, perhaps, less physical pain than might have been expected. Doctors looked grave, and shook their heads, but ordered brandy, stimulants, opiates, nevertheless; everything to relieve pain, to rouse vitality, and to sustain strength. Still she pined and faded gradually away, lying for hours together in a state of utter unconsciousness and stupor, varied at intervals, further and further apart, by a vague longing restlessness, that produced fever and exhaustion. She could only speak in whispers, and even such weak efforts were attended with considerable exertion, but her large black eyes, glowing and beautiful with the light that is kindled in

some other world than this, would follow Norah about the sick room, with a touching wistful gaze, that seemed to implore forgiveness, while it expressed remorse, gratitude, and affection.

Mrs. Vandeleur scarcely left her side, and, indeed, the poor sufferer grew very desponding and querulous when she missed the gentle touch that anticipated all her wants, and the kind loving eyes that never looked upon her but with sympathy, forgiveness, and compassion.

Here were two women, each of whom had injured the other in her dearest hopes, her deepest and most sacred affections; but one had learned those lessons of resignation and self-sacrifice by which mortals must be trained for immortality. And the other was even now trembling on a shore, where much that seemed so necessary in her earthly journey was to be discarded and abandoned, as but vain incumbrance for her future voyage on the silent sea—so vague, so dark, so cold, so terrible to all. Yet over its dreary surface is there not shed a light from the shining form of Him who walks upon the waters, and stretches out a hand to save the weakest of us ere we sink into an unfathomable deep?

These two had forgiven each other their injuries, as they hoped themselves to be forgiven. There was nothing between them now but peace, and confidence, and goodwill. I suppose if patients were doctors they, too, would err on the side of timidity, and shrink with professional caution from anything in the shape of responsibility. The best advice in London forbade all excitement as most injurious to the sufferer, and peremptorily interdicted Fanny from the visits of her husband. At last, however, on one occasion, when, after an exceedingly bad night, the invalid had prayed very earnestly for a few minutes' conversation with Gerard, three wise men, whose faces looked wiser and more solemn than usual, announced that her petition might be granted, and then Mrs. Vandeleur knew that there was no longer any hope.

It lasted but a short time, that interview between husband and wife, the first for long years of separation, never to be repeated here on earth. No one else was present, and mutual forgiveness, penitence, reconciliation, whatever took place, remained as they ought to remain, without witness and without record; only, weak as she was, Fanny's tones could be heard uninterrupted for many minutes con-

secutively, as if she were arguing and expostulating on some subject very near her heart, so that when Gerard left the room, pale, trembling, with tearful eyes, and she called him back once more to her bedside, the last words she ever spoke to her husband were heard plainly by, at least, one mourning listener, through the half-closed door.

"Then you've promised, dear, and I'm easy. It's the only way to undo all the harm I've done you; and you'll be happy, Gerard, never fear. You're young still, you know,—young for a man. And I couldn't have made you the right sort of wife—not if it was ever so. I wasn't brought up to it. And Gerard, dear, in Ripley churchyard, as I said, close to father—d'ye mind? I'm tired now—I think I'll take a sleep. God bless you, Gerard! Perhaps I'll see you to-morrow—perhaps, dear, I'll never see you again!

* * * * * *

It is easy to understand how a lady of Miss Tregunter's wealth, fashion, and general pretensions could only be married at such a church as St. George's or St. James's, and of these she elected the latter, in consequence, I imagine, of some technical necessity connected with her bridegroom's

residence in that parish. Of bridesmaids, I understand, she had exactly four couple, though why so large an escort should have been requisite, what were the duties of these beautiful auxiliaries, or how far the bride derived moral support from their presence, I am at a loss to conjecture. There they were, nevertheless, all in pink, decorated, besides, with ornaments of rubies, precisely similar in pattern, presented by the bridegroom.

Miss Tregunter herself was obliged to abandon her favourite colour, in compliance with the dictates of an over-fastidious civilisation, but preserved as much of it as possible in her cheeks, so that when she dropped her veil, Burton, who was best man on the occasion, felt forcibly reminded of the lace-covered toilet-table in her dressing-room, as he beheld it, when admitted with other hymeneal officials to a public view of her *trousseau* laid out in that apartment.

The Dandy was free from his difficulties after all, and had escaped far better than he deserved. There are men in the world, more than we generally suppose, for whom it is an impossibility to hit an enemy when he is down, and Gerard Ainslie was one of them. During Fanny's illness this gentleman

could not, of course, leave England, as he had originally intended, and the disposal, at considerable loss, of the district he had purchased in South America, with the sale of that well-found barque, *The White Rose*, letter A, No. 1, entered at Lloyd's clinker-built and copper-fastened, besides full freight and provisions lying on board of her in London Docks, put him in possession of a large sum of ready money, for which he believed he could find no more fitting use than to extricate Burton from his most pressing liabilities, thus, to use Dolly Egremont's expression, "setting him on his legs again, though the beggar didn't deserve it, and giving him one more chance to be a man or a mouse!"

There was but little of the sentimental in Mr. Burton's composition; but his wonted eloquence deserted him when he grasped the friend's hand whom he had injured so cruelly, and tried to thank him, with dry lips and a knot in his throat. For once his heart was too full to speak.

He made a capital "best man" for Dolly though, nevertheless, arranging all the details and ceremonious observances of the wedding, with a tact that seems especially accorded by nature to those who are predestined to remain bachelors themselves. The

cake with its ring and thimble was ordered, and I believe compounded under his directions. The lawyers were hastened, the license was procured, the clergyman advertised, the wedding feast provided, and the invitations were sent out. Not the most distant relation of bride or bridegroom was omitted, and I have been unable to learn that anybody took offence at the slightest neglect or want of deference during the whole proceedings, so that when Theresa in the vestry signed her name to the register with a flourish, just below "Cousin Charles," she was justified in affirming that through the whole course of her experience she had never been concerned in so orderly, so well-conducted, and altogether so decorous a wedding!

They were likely to be indeed a happy couple; and every one of their friends wished them well. None more so than a man in deep mourning passing down the street, as the last carriage with its liveried servants, brilliant in bouquets and white favours, set its freight of beauty down at the church door. His dress denoted that he had lately sustained some domestic bereavement, but on Gerard Ainslie's brow might be traced a joyous expression of hope and confidence, such as it had not worn since the days of

Marston Rectory and Ripley marshes, long ago. In his eyes had come that light which the poet tells us was "never yet on sea or shore," but which most of us have seen at some period of our lives, in the eyes we best love to look on here below, that we humbly hope will shine on us unchanged in heaven hereafter.

The association of ideas, the links on which thought follows thought as wave succeeds to wave. and the tendency to speak aloud when none but ourselves can hear, are amongst the eccentricities of reason, the most eccentric, the most unreasonable. Turning into St. James's Street, a crossing-sweeper on whom he bestowed a shilling was the only listener to Gerard's unconnected thanksgiving—

"What have I done to deserve to be so happy? How can I ever hope to be worthy of her? I suppose my darling will have to be married in a bonnet, when the year is out. She surely won't insist on waiting longer than that?"

And Norah didn't!

THE END.

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