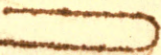


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CLARA FANE.

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THE CONTRASTS OF A LIFE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY JOHN ATHERTON.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF COMMONS," "THE HOUSE OF LORDS," "THE HOUSE OF BURGESS," "THE HOUSE OF COMMONS," "THE HOUSE OF LORDS," "THE HOUSE OF BURGESS," "THE HOUSE OF COMMONS," "THE HOUSE OF LORDS," "THE HOUSE OF BURGESS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON.

WILLIAM BENTLEY AND SONS, 11, BUNYARD STREET.

1858.

CLARA FANE;

OR,

THE CONTRASTS OF A LIFE.

Trau. Schau. Mem.

BY LOUISA STUART COSTELLO,

AUTHOR OF "THE ROSE GARDEN OF PERSIA," "MEMOIRS OF JACQUES
CŒUR," "THE QUEEN MOTHER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
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CLARA FANE

THE CONTINENTAL OF A FIVE

MISS JANE DE WILKINSON

AND OTHERS

IN THREE VOLUMES

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VOL. I.

LONDON:

W. OSTELL, PRINTER, HART STREET, BLOOMSBURY SQUARE;
AND BURLINGTON MEWS, REGENT STREET.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND,

MISS JANET WILKINSON,

IN MEMORY OF A VISIT TO

LLANGOLLEN,

This Story is dedicated by

HER AFFECTIONATE

L. S. C.

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CLARA FANE.

CHAPTER I.

Oh ciel! expliquez moi ce discours, je vous prie.
Ce sont des incidents grands et mysterieux.

Molière.

It was at a period between the two last revolutions of Paris, for it now becomes necessary to measure time by those very frequent events in France, that on the occasion of a *fête* in the Champs Elysées, two very pretty young ladies were walking arm-in-arm down one of the avenues near Passy, conversing in a confidential manner and loitering as if waiting to be joined by others of their party, in order that they might proceed in a body to the centre of the busy scene, which is always so attractive to Parisians.

The friends, though both very attractive, were extremely different in appearance. Eugenie Petit,

the shortest and least slender of the two, for their ages were about the same, was a perfect type of a young French girl of the middle classes. She had bright black eyes and finely marked eyebrows, lustrous hair and a high colour, round rosy cheeks dimpled with smiles, a light step and small feet, was admirably *chaussée* and *gantée*, and faultless in the smartness and neatness of her attire.

Clara Fane, her companion, less showily dressed, was much taller and slighter, and walked with an air of more timidity although with equal grace, and her movements possessed a dignity so superior that she could not for a moment be mistaken for a person belonging to the same class as that which the *charmante* Eugenie illustrated.

They appeared, however, to be on a footing of entire equality, and were talking with great familiarity.

“My dear friend,” said Eugenie, “I am trying to forget that we are to lose you so soon—how *triste* and miserable I shall be when you are gone, and how wretched for you to go back to your own foggy country—how you will regret our sunshine and our charming Paris—there can be nothing like it in the world!”

“I shall, dearest Eugenie,” replied Clara, “indeed regret all I leave here, even though I shall again be welcomed by that kind friend who

has been a mother to me and whom I would even quit you to see again."

"And you are, after all, then to be a governess!" said Eugenie; "you, who are fit to be a duchess. Why did not some great, rich man fall in love with you here and lay his fortune at your feet! but an English milor will do as well, and you will yet have the rank you deserve."

"Ah! Eugenie," returned Clara, smiling, "you are for ever thinking of marrying! I assure you I do not, and mean henceforth to be even more grave and steady than you have accused me of being since I have been staying with you here. As I have neither fortune nor connections I have my own way to make in the world, but I feel cheerful and confident, and am ready to enter on my new career with plenty of hope and good expectation."

"You are always content and always trustful, dear Clara," said Eugenie; "we are alike in that particular, and it is the best way, for fearing the worst cannot help to better at any rate. Here is mamma and Gustave," she added, with a slight blush which added to the beauty of her lively good-humoured face, "and now we shall walk all about the fair and see everything."

It was evident by the manner of the gay, smart young man who now came smiling up with

an elderly lady on his arm, that he was a particular and very welcome friend of the pretty Eugenie, who was immediately transferred to his care, while Clara became the companion of her mother.

They soon met a variety of acquaintances, and, with the usual gaiety of French people, gave themselves up to the delights of a dusty, crowded, noisy *fête*, at all times the elysium of the population of Paris. The music and dancing, the swings and roundabouts, the booths and theatres, were all visited and enjoyed, and even a quadrille party had been made amongst themselves beneath the trees, where partners were in abundance, and the utmost gaiety prevailed, after which the society, of which Clara and Eugenie formed a part, agreed to accompany them in a body to their domicile in the Avenue Lord Byron by a fine moonlight, before they separated for the night.

As they were emerging from the most crowded part of the fair, beneath a shaded grove of trees they observed a small temple illuminated, on which, in transparent letters, an announcement was placed, inviting the curious to learn their future destiny from a celebrated German Wizard, who professed, of course, to know all things, past, present, and to come. It was impossible to pass this spot without interest, and the tittering and laughing of the young ladies, in spite of their

refusals, showed that they were not seriously offended at the proposals of their partners to consult the oracle.

Gustave Lecoq, in particular, was very persuasive that his friend Eugenie should enter the charmed circle and learn the fate reserved for her, and Eugenie at length agreed to do so on condition that Clara dared the adventure of the Wizard's den at the same time, and after several of her other friends had reported their success.

One pretty, tripping, lively French girl after another entered and returned from the illuminated pavilion, each with a smile on her countenance, for the sage appeared to predict in a happy hour, when no evil influences were at work and the destinies of the young world only exhibited the bright side.

When a gentleman was admitted he was received by the Wizard, who sat at a table dimly lighted, in order the more to contrast with the brilliant lamps without, he was commanded to look in an enchanted mirror where the image of the *dame de ses pensées* appeared to him, adorned in the last Parisian *mode* and holding in her hand a very large bouquet of flowers. The glance, although momentary, was sufficient to show to every one, like the shadow seen by Faust at the Witches' Revel, the image of her he loved, and as

no second look was permitted, minute examination was precluded.

The ladies were welcomed by the Wizard with more ceremony—their palms were first surveyed, their countenances read, and they were then shown in another mirror the image of the youth they desired to see.

They then drew from a vase on the table beside the Wizard a folded paper on which the secrets of their fate were inscribed in mysterious and ambiguous language, capable of much and varied explanation.

Neither Clara nor Eugenie read the papers they had chosen at the moment they drew them; the latter reserving that *bonne bouche* for the privacy of her chamber, and the former having forgotten it. Eugenie had, she asserted, seen in the mirror the exact resemblance of Gustave Lecoq, and he assured her, during all the rest of their walk, that it was impossible any painting could have exhibited so perfect a likeness as his glance revealed to him of her laughing, rosy cheeks, black, sparkling eyes, bright, braided, dark hair, and charming, little, round figure.

Clara had been so much amused at the trembling belief with which her friend approached the magic mirror that she was very careless of the lineaments which appeared to her gaze, and was obliged to

confess, afterwards, that she had actually omitted to notice the colour of the gentleman's eyes and hair, whose image for a brief instant had stood before her.

One thing, however, she had remarked—the remarkably courteous manner of the Sage, the length of time he was examining her hand, and the long survey he took of her physiognomy, without which, he said, it was impossible to decide on her fortune. She had become, at last, ungratefully impatient of his devoted wish to tell her true, and, while he was importuned by several young girls, whom he had kept writing, had contrived to slip away, leaving Eugenie to be re-conducted by Gustave, and had rejoined her party outside, rather ashamed of the foolish proceeding altogether.

When they were alone in their room, Eugenie with a very grave countenance, directly she had thrown aside her bonnet and shawl, began to unfold the scroll of fate which chance had awarded to her, and her blushes and exclamations told that marvels were contained in the little bit of crumpled paper. She read an exact description of her lover; his disposition, his intentions, and his prosperous future. She read of a speedy wedding, a humble but happy establishment, and a variety of the most agreeable combinations.

“Don’t think me silly, Clara,” said she; “but even a trifle like this seems to confirm my good opinion of Gustave, and I feel convinced we are destined for each other.”

“I see no reason why not,” replied Clara; “you are both young, both in love, no one opposes your union, and though you are neither of you rich you have plenty of industry, hope and cheerfulness. I have no doubt you will be married before the end of the year.”

“How very singular,” said Eugenie, “that is exactly what the old Wizard’s paper tells. But where is yours? how indifferent you are! I was dying to read mine all the way home.”

There was much search on the part of Eugenie for Clara’s paper which at length was found in one of her gloves and carried to the light to be read.

“Oh! I am not in love,” said Clara; “there is sure to be nothing interesting in my fortune.”

“We shall see,” exclaimed her friend with animation; “the Wizard said your destiny was an uncommon one,” and she read with great gravity, exclaiming, “you have a German motto—mine was in French—you see he suits all comers—Gustave’s was in English and I was obliged to translate it for him—but I would not show him my paper. Hear what is in store for you.”

The oracle she read was headed with these words:—

“Trau, Schau, Wem.”

“Aquarius governs your destiny. You are lost and found. You will have more friends than enemies. The world is better than it is reputed. Be not too confident. The danger escaped in infancy threatens later in life. Total wreck, but if surmounted, success and happiness. The Heavens invite or dispose to good or evil, but do not compel to either.”

“Nothing in this strikes me as worth notice,” said Clara, “except an odd coincidence. Gustave Lecoq’s father you know, made me this bracelet, which Mrs. Fowler desired me to buy as a souvenir before I left Paris, and that very motto I chose to be engraved on it for a particular reason—a recollection of infancy.”

“And what,” inquired Eugenie, “does TRAU, SCHAU, WEM, mean? you know I always had so much trouble in learning German, it is so ugly. If it had not been for you I am sure I should have been disgusted with English which is not half as bad. After all French is the only language in the world worth knowing—but explain to me these strange words for they excite my curiosity.”

“Like many words in that most remarkable and interesting language which is not so happy

as to please your Parisian ear, dear Eugenie," replied Clara; "these three contain much meaning—they express the necessity of exercising the faculty of observation in order that you may be enabled to bestow your trust judiciously."

"*Eh, mon Dieu!* my dear friend," said Eugenie, laughing; "*qu'est ce que tu me chantes?* why the words are only 'trust, show, who.'"

"Nevertheless, *petite incredule,*" said Clara, "what I tell you is fact—they will however bear the translation—'Examine those you trust.'"

"That will do," said Eugenie; "I am satisfied now. But is it not a most amazing proof of the conjuror's power that he should hit on your very motto?"

Eugenie was so much amazed at this accident that it the more convinced her of the skill of the Wizard, and the certainty of her own fate being accomplished in the manner she wished, she therefore slept happily that night, although she was to part from her friend Clara the next day, who was returning to England, after having lived domesticated in her family for several years, pursuing the studies which had rendered her as accomplished as she was interesting and beautiful.

This arose from no want of feeling or sensibility on the part of Eugenie Petit, but she was only eighteen, and had just acknowledged to her

own heart that Gustave Lecoq, the son of a prosperous jeweller in the Rue de la Paix, was exactly the person she had been dreaming of for some time and whom the stars might, she hoped, destine for her husband.

CHAPTER II.

Simple.—" 'Tis a great charge to come under one body's hand.
Mrs. Quickly.—You shall find it a great charge; and to be up early, and down late!"

Merry Wives of Windsor.

PERHAPS one of the least attractive streets to be found in that part of London where Oxford Street extends its long line of shops from Hyde Park to St. Giles's, is one, the name of which nevertheless suggests ideas of struggling patriotism, picturesque costumes, fancy charity balls and large subscriptions, noble enthusiasm, devotion to a fallen race and Utopian theories to overthrow tyrannical oppression.

Yet, in Poland Street, for that is the locality alluded to, the most imaginative of travellers, who can find in the Judenstrasse of Frankfort, or the Fuggerei of Augsburg, or in numerous streets of Rouen or old Paris, food for romance, might look in vain for a building, dirty and grim though they all be as any to be paralleled in Germany

or France, capable of furnishing him with a subject for his journal or his sketch book.

To be sure, there is the passport office, if not romantic or picturesque in itself, yet the cause of both in others, opening a wide field of adventure to the adventurous, and as full of visions of enjoyment as any fairy palace of Arabian story.

There is the parish workhouse too, able probably to furnish a thousand romances, if properly studied, and the same might no doubt be said of many of the "little brown cages" so disliked by our neighbours over the water, from whence the prisoners at large of London hop about the muddy streets like sparrows in the fogs, of which no chemical discovery has yet cleared the densest of all possible atmospheres.

It was in Poland Street, that, in one of these identical brown cages, so opposite in appearance to the many-windowed, balconied, towering domicils in Paris, there dwelt a widow, short, fat, and inquisitive, whose occupation, carried on for many years, was letting out in parcels different stages of her abode, and making the most of the dingy tenement that called her mistress.

The Widow Spicer and her pretty daughter Maria were, at past eleven o'clock one night late in autumn, sitting up waiting the arrival of some new lodgers who were to occupy the second floor

and who had been expected for some hours. Mrs. Spicer had looked many times impatiently at a large watch which hung above the chimney piece, and Maria had yawned unceasingly for some minutes; it was advancing close upon midnight yet the strangers did not arrive; at length the widow's patience was exhausted.

"They're only second floor lodgers after all," said she, "and I dare say they won't come to-night."

"Perhaps something has happened to the Southampton train," suggested Maria; "I hope not."

"Whenever I expect anyone something always does happen," said Mrs. Spicer. "Dr. Cowley said they would be sure to be here by nine and I don't see why they shouldn't. I've let the lodgings too cheap as it is, to please him because he recommends us so much, but I won't be made a slave of and be kept up all night. Perhaps there's been some revolution in France and the young lady's killed, they generally kick up a breeze there once or twice a year. I can't think what people go flourishing abroad for, for my part, when they can be so comfortable at home. They don't find such nice houses as this I warrant in their dirty towns."

"Dear me," said Maria, looking alarmed, "I should be sorry if those two ladies had met

with an accident; it gives me quite a turn to think of it. Dr. Cowley says that the young one is so clever, and has learnt everything in France: I do so want to see her."

"I should be glad to see them both," returned her mother; "I hope they're not going to disappoint me. That floor's been unlucky all the year; and how I get on at all is a wonder to me in these times. I'm sure it's a hard life for a poor widow to slave as I do, when my mind is so above it too. Now you, Maria, have no literary turn, and, I do believe, couldn't make a verse to save your life."

"La, ma!" exclaimed Maria, laughing, "that I couldn't! I can only sing them."

"Well, that's something, too," said Mrs. Spicer; "everyone hasn't a genius. I'm certain, if it wasn't for this house, I could make a fortune by writing books, and I needn't turn my back on any for poems; it's as easy to me, pretty near, as speaking. I might have been quite a lady by this time if your poor, dear father hadn't always laughed me out of it, and then he goes and dies in a decline and leaves me without a penny and two children to support; to be sure your poor, dear brother was taken off young, and now I've only you."

Mrs. Spicer's reminiscences in this vein were

suddenly checked by another recollection, and she exclaimed—

“Has Mr. Frewen’s milk been paid this week?”

Maria did not know. Mrs. Spicer therefore had to search in a certain table-drawer, where she kept her accounts, for the bill, and this occupation prevented her from noticing that another half-hour had elapsed. Having found the receipt she was anxious for, Mrs. Spicer took up several other scraps of paper, on many of which unequal lines were scribbled.

“Ah!” sighed she, “here’s my last; I’ve never had time to finish it. Young Simpson said he was sure, if it was set, it would be the fashionable song of the season; it begins well—

I rebuffed his carresses—

Maria,” she whispered, “shut Grimford’s door—I declare it’s ajar—he’ll be fine and crusty if he hears us talking and he sleeping so close. Cross as he is we mustn’t offend him, for he’s your godpapa and may remember us in his will. I’m sure I’ve plenty to do with tempers in this house; what with him, and Frewen in the first floor, I’ve a nice time of it. I’ve a good mind to raise Frewen’s rent, for he gives such a deal of trouble and is never satisfied.”

“But then he wouldn't stay,” said Maria; “he's such a tyrant he won't be contradicted; I hate to go near him for my part.”

“All those India folks are the same,” replied her mother, “they're used to such slave-driving; but he's rich, I have no doubt, or else he wouldn't be so mean. I wish he'd fall in love with you, Maria, and marry you out of hand; I could then look out for myself.”

“La, ma!” cried Maria, “I wouldn't have such a man for all the world!”

“Oh, you'll never get married, it's my belief,” said Mrs. Spicer; “you like nobody!”

Maria, on this, turned away and blushed very deeply.

“Now,” continued her mother, “there's young Simpson, quite a gentleman, you never encourage him, and that wouldn't be a bad match with his expectations from the Pennymans. He's so droll! he vows I'm the height of the Medecy Venus, and he says she's about my size. I wish he wouldn't say so, though, before Grimford—he knows nothing about literary things, and he only sneers.”

“So does Simpson, ma,” said Maria, with a slight frown, “he doesn't mean it.”

“Perhaps not,” said the matron, “but he isn't the first that has told me the same thing.”

It will be naturally supposed that Mrs. Spicer, who thus revived classical associations in the mind of an admirer of the statue that enchants the world, was a model of female beauty; but the fact was, that when her upstairs attic lodger first made the comparison, which so much flattered her, he thought, in the gaiety of his heart, that she would receive the compliment, as he intended it, as a joke; but, finding that she considered him serious, he was so much tickled that he, from that period, made it a standing jest, and was never weary of repeating the terms "little Venus," "pocket Medici," and other diminutive expressions, which Mrs. Spicer was content to believe characterised her short, dumpy, Welch figure, where anything like grace or beauty had never dwelt, even in youth, before she exchanged her state of attendant on a Welch lady of fashion, at Cardigan, for that of partner for life to the respectable Mr. Spicer, whose calling she described to her lodgers, who had not known him, as having been "under government," a mystery sometimes too rudely explained, by Mr. Grimford, the old friend of the family and Maria's godfather, as a general postman.

Mr. Spicer was, in truth, a man of letters, and it was in carrying on his high calling for the benefit of others that he had caught those repeated

colds which ended in a decline, and caused him to leave his wife and two infant children unprovided for, some years previous to the time when she stood in her house in Poland Street, waiting for two ladies who ought to arrive from France. No sooner was Mrs. Spicer a widow than she began to speculate upon the possibility of her husband's friend, Grimford, being an eligible person to supply his place, and assist her by his supposed means in the arduous duties of bringing up her family and carrying on the establishment, which, already begun in her husband's life-time, she desired to continue. She was accustomed to let all her house but two rooms, which she reserved for herself and her daughter Maria, now about eighteen, a pretty, fair girl, whose frequent attacks of cold threatened that her life would not be long, in spite of the bloom on her cheek and the robust appearance of her short figure, but little slighter than that of her mother.

Mr. Grimford, the object of fifteen years' unwearied attack on the part of the Widow Spicer, was a Northumbrian, of tall stature, heavy limbs, large bone, and a sullen aspect, about as much like the Apollo, as Mrs. Spicer was like the Venus of beautiful celebrity. It was not often that Mr. Grimford was seen to smile, and when he did it was generally in contempt at the

Widow's unblushing hints, which revealed her purpose too well; he was a bachelor of the most resolute description; he had never intended to marry; he had, besides, resolved that he never would marry, but he was content to leave Mrs. Spicer in happy uncertainty as to his ultimate intentions, as by so doing he secured to himself a more carefully-tended home and more attention than the small sum he paid for occupying her back-parlour and a closet beyond might have warranted. If he was not so rich as the Widow imagined, he had wherewithal to afford himself occasional indulgences, and sometimes to give her the means of appearing in the eyes of certain honoured guests as the mistress of a hospitable establishment. Oysters in barrels, unexpected lobsters, Yorkshire pie, a smoked goose, a few bottles of Scotch ale, at periods enlivened the board in the front parlour, particularly when Dr. Cowley, who gave his professional services for nothing to the Widow, her friend, and family, was a rare but welcome visitor.

Mr. Grimford was an artist; that is he used the pencil to delineate certain singularly-shaped buildings, with towers, belfries, or spires, as the case might be, intended to be erected in some favoured part of London or its neighbourhood, and for this he, from time to time, was known to

obtain prizes at some institution, so frequent in the metropolis, for the encouragement of merit, where the committee possessed judgment capable of appreciating excellence of the order in which he was pre-eminent.

His own room was covered from floor to ceiling with specimens of his art, framed and glazed, and, as he had room for no more, he had permitted Mrs. Spicer to adorn her front parlour with the rest of his treasures, and marvellously grand were the elevations of churches, arches, bridges, and hospitals, which invited inspection on the walls of this crowded chamber, where, of an evening, several lodgers who inhabited the highest stories of the house as dormitories, were accustomed to congregate for an hour before betaking themselves to repose for the night.

Maria was the sole object of her mother's aspirations, yielding in interest only to the Grimford scheme, of which, however, she formed a part, inasmuch as she would inevitably benefit by its success; but Mrs. Spicer was an essentially selfish and worldly-minded woman, intent on gain and alive to all means of securing it, both in trifles and in great matters, and she did not see so clearly as some standers-by that the health of her daughter was so uncertain that a sudden blow might at once put an end to all the schemes which she was

continually forming for the advantage of the most single-minded, simple-hearted creature in the world, who never looked beyond the present moment of enjoyment, and never imagined anything beyond the happy state of content in which she lived.

Maria Spicer was, by some of the young men who were in the habit of "dropping in" at her mother's, looked upon as the prettiest girl in Poland Street; but others declared in favour of the beauty of a neighbour, whose pretensions were much higher, both on the score of dignity and fashion, for Miss Celia Sawyer had been educated at a first-rate boarding-school, went to Willis's Rooms, and *déjeunés* at Norwood, and was altogether in very high society.

She had been so well instructed that she could not but hold in just contempt the very small talents of Maria, whom, having been her neighbour from infancy, she could not do otherwise than patronise, in spite of her inferiority. She was well aware that Maria knew nothing whatever of the science of music, and was extremely surprised, as well as annoyed, to find that her clear, imperfect voice attracted more admiration than her own husky, though correct, one, and her mortification was at times extreme, to find that the young men in Mrs. Spicer's parlour, which she

sometimes condescended to enlighten with her presence, seemed more ready to admire her good-natured, laughing little neighbour, than to flirt with her whose accomplishments and person were of a superior order.

Celia was tall and slight, a little bony perhaps, but still handsome: her skin was somewhat dingy when compared to the lilies and roses of Maria, but she had fine black eyes and hair, and good teeth, and a certain air of London fashion or assurance that imposed. She was a consummate flirt, and her attention to her dress and appearance gave her great advantages over Maria, whose simplicity of character was as evident in her costume as her demeanour.

However, with all these differences, Maria and Celia were the dearest of all possible friends, and had numerous secrets between them, and were never weary of meeting. Maria, from really liking and being proud of her friend, whose great superiority she cheerfully acknowledged, and Celia, in the latent hope of meeting at Mrs. Spicer's some eligible match which should raise her above the sordid position in which her father, whose calling was that of a tailor, confined and cabined her mind and body.

The tailor, however, was not supposed to be making money, though Celia, who was an only

child, professed to have a right to look forward to becoming one day, as she said, "the heiress of Poland Street." She was, nevertheless, aware that her papa had been more than once a bankrupt, and that his credit did not stand very high, any more than his reputation, for morality. He indulged his daughter, however, in all her whims, and, it was suspected, was not very scrupulous as to her conduct, never checking her in any of her sallies or withholding from her the means of expense.

Mrs. Spicer might have had time to relate all these particulars of her neighbours herself, while she waited for her new lodgers, whom, as the clock struck twelve, she gave up, and shutting her drawer, without finishing her song, and giving Maria the brass candlestick which supported the now "brief candle" which should light them to bed, the pair prepared to abandon their watch.

They had just shut the door behind them, and were proceeding along the passage when the sudden sound of wheels along the stony street caused them to pause, and in another minute the stoppage of a vehicle announced that an interruption to her proposed retirement for the night was about to take place.

"Drat it!" exclaimed Mrs. Spicer, impatiently and most unpoetically, as a loud knock made her

start and almost drop the large watch she held in her hand; "here they are then—and the gal gone to bed, and Mr. Grimford asleep, and Frewen too, who'll be as cross as two sticks in the morning, and perhaps go away in a huff—and all for only second floor people either! Well, we must let 'em in. Maria, run, can't you, you're so slow—don't take down the chain—it may be thieves—ask who it is."

Maria, meantime, whose movements were quickened by curiosity, had unlocked the street-door, and was peeping through the opening left by the intervening chain; to her question of who was there, a rather sharp voice answered:

"The ladies who are expected, to be sure: open the door, my good woman, to Miss Fane and Mrs. Fowler, recommended to this respectable establishment by Dr. Cowley."

The reverend mention of her domicile at the close of this speech, softened the ire that was rising in the breast of the Medicean Venus at hearing the word "good woman," an epithet seldom favourably received by any one to whom it is applied, although it is difficult to assign a reason for the offence it gives. Mrs. Spicer reflected also, as she stood in the passage hesitating, only for an instant, whether she would have the door opened or not, that she must not offend Dr. Cowley, and

had set the candle down on the stairs, and returned to the front parlour, which she unlocked, when a gruff voice was heard from the back parlour, as a head, covered with a red nightcap, thrust itself from a half-opened door at the foot of the staircase which led to the kitchen flight.

“Don’t you hear the knocks? What d’ye mean by letting people stand knocking and ringing like that, and disturbing the neighb’hood? I’ve heard the door go this half-hour.”

“That’s not true, Mr. Grimford,” retorted Mrs. Spicer; “Maria and me was only on the point of going up when they knocked. You’d better go to bed and not catch the influenza. I shall have to nurse you, you know very well, for who have you to take care of you but me?”

“Hold y’re nonsense, and open the door,” growled her tender friend; “I want nobody to nurse me; I only want to sleep, and if you keep such hours how am I to do it?”

So saying, Grimford, whose curiosity had evidently kept him waking, though he had not appeared to be cognisant of the probable arrival of Dr. Cowley’s recommended friends, shut his door with a bang, and was seen no more.

Some altercation with the cabman, who asked double his fare, which Mrs. Spicer, when appealed to, pretended not to know, occupied a few minutes,

after which the two ladies got out, and their baggage was carried into the passage, to remain till "the gal" could take it up to their rooms in the morning.

They seemed fatigued, and the younger lady, in a gentle voice, having addressed herself to Maria and apologised for their late arrival, Mrs. Spicer, softened by the humility of her manner, and somewhat influenced by her interesting appearance, abandoned the air of dignity she had assumed, and fairly welcomed both strangers to her house.

"I'm very glad, I'm sure," said she, looking inquisitively at Mrs. Fowler, and glancing benignly at Miss Fane, "to see any particular friends of Dr. Cowley's here. I am but a poor widow and can't afford much, but Welch hospitality and a hearty welcome I'm always ready to give. You'll take cream or milk in the morning, mum? And shall I tell the baker to bring rolls or half-quartered—bread's very dear now, and a poor widow like me feels it hard enough. I hope you're not cold—the rooms is well aired, and the gal slept in the bed last night. Will you like a night-light? Its too late for hot water now, for I thought to have seen you at eight. Dr. Cowley said you would be sure to come. I might have let over and over, but I said, says I, the Doctor has always been a

friend to me and mine, and his friends shall have the preference, though the apartment is cheaper than any in the street, and, though I say it, as good as any in it; and so convenient—close to the passport office and the workhouse.”

CHAPTER III.

This is a gift that I have, simple, simple—

The gift is good in those in whom it is acute, and I am thankful for it.

Love's Labour Lost.

THE next day was not far advanced when the well-known knock of the Doctor was attended to by Mrs. Spicer in person, who hastened to let in her patron, and to inform him of the arrival of his friends.

“They have had their breakfast,” said she, “and look quite comfortable and at home up stairs; to be sure my second is quite as good as any other first, and I fancy beds like mine are not so easy to be found in France, where they are so dirty and delapidated that I wonder English people can stand it; but it depends a good deal on what folks are used to—and perhaps Mrs. Fowler isn't particular. She's a widow I suppose, Doctor, and

Miss Fane's her niece?" added Mrs. Spicer, in an insinuating tone.

"I don't know whether she's a widow or has only brevet rank, dame," replied Dr. Cowley, laughing, as he observed the curiosity he was accustomed to peeping out in the inquiries addressed to him: "and I have no idea whether or not she is any relation to Miss Fane, whom I have never seen."

"Never seen!" exclaimed the hostess; "why Maria says you raved about her beauty."

"Yes; but it is only by hearsay that I know she is very pretty," replied Dr. Cowley; "Mrs. Fowler tells me so. But can I pay my respects to the ladies? Let Maria run up and see if they can receive me yet."

While Maria was sent on this errand, the Widow occupied herself in endeavouring to find out from the Doctor some satisfactory particulars respecting her lodgers; but he was, apparently, either ignorant or indifferent about them, and turned off her questions with a careless air.

"Come, dame," said he, "don't trouble your head about who or what these ladies are—one of them is an old patient of mine; if I sought out the histories of all the people I attend, I should never have done. How's Grimford? and the cross old Indian? when am I to congratulate you?"

have you written any more verses lately? answer all my questions at once, for I've not much time to spare. That last poem of your's has had great success at the club—Byron was nothing to it."

"Oh! you mean," said Mrs. Spicer, simpering and putting one of her brown hands in the table drawer, where she usually deposited the effusions which were the delight of her circle, "you mean my poem on Spring:—

‘The Muses stares me in the face,
I can't resist their smiles—’ ”

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Doctor; "that's the one! capital! never was a better poem written! why don't you print? By heavens! you'd make your fortune, and get a pension from government, to a dead certainty."

"I begun another, better than that," returned Mrs. Spicer, with sparkling eyes; "but I must read it low, for Grimford's such a brute about poetry—he's no soul for the Muses. It's on a thrush."

"A thrush!" cried the Doctor, rising from his seat, and looking towards the door in the hope of Maria's summons.

"Yes," replied the hostess, "I heard one on a bush the other day, when we went to Hornsey, to

Mrs. Pennyman's country-house, and I felt directly that Apollo inspired me.

“The balmy, gay notes of the sweet little thrush,
Invites me awhile to be gay,
So sweetly he pipes upon yon hawthorn bush—”

“The ladies are quite ready to receive you,” exclaimed Maria, at this juncture, opening the door, through which, without ceremony, the Doctor bolted, and thus lost the concluding line of the poem Mrs. Spicer was fain to shut up again in her table drawer for future use.

“I wonder what keeps Grimford at home all the morning?” said she to her daughter; “he’s as cross-grained as ever he can be, and does nothing but pish and snap at my taking in people at twelve o’clock at night. It’s no business of his, as I tell him—but he’s such a bear that he will be growling! I wish you’d take up these bills to Frewen, perhaps he’ll pay to-day—I want money bad enough.”

“Don’t send me, ma,” said Maria, setting down to her brown, dusty piano, off the top of which she had previously lifted some plates and a waiter; “you know I never like to go.”

“I’ll see about it,” mused her mother; “men are such tyrants! but he’s rich enough to pay, and he shall. I’ll just clap on a shilling to

his bread bill, and another to his milk score, to teach him manners."

The poetess accordingly, dipping a stump of a pen into a dingy inkstand, proceeded to execute her threat, while Maria began to warble in a sweet voice.

"I wish you'd practice the song young Simpson brought you," said her mother; "you're always at that one."

"Wybrow gave me this," said Maria: "I hate the other."

"Wybrow!" exclaimed Mrs. Spicer; "he's poor enough."

"That does not signify," said Maria, smiling; "he's very amiable."

Mrs. Spicer, with rather a vexed expression, here left the room to repair to the first floor: but when she had reached that stage she was inspired by a sudden idea, and continuing her ascent noiselessly till the second floor was gained, halted at the door of the sitting-room, where she appeared suddenly seized with a fit of poetical abstraction, for she remained as if rooted to the spot, with her ear inclined towards the somewhat wide opening which occurred between the door and the door-post, which accident of construction enabled any one without to hear sounds almost as clearly as within the apartment.

Mrs. Spicer justly considered that it saved a world of trouble to herself and her lodgers if she at once on their arrival made herself mistress of their affairs, and since she had failed in eliciting information from Dr. Cowley, she thought this a good opportunity to avail herself of any revelations which the conversation she was likely to overhear might furnish her with.

It was, originally, by this method that she had arrived at the knowledge of the fact that Mr. Frewen, of the first floor, was worth money, that he had no near relations, but that he had some he particularly detested, as he thought it possible that they might look upon his purse as a resource which he had secretly resolved they should not find to be the case. From this knowledge she was led to consider the probability of his seeking for an heir in some attached stranger—and what more likely than that a poor and worthy widow like herself, full of attentions and regard for him, might be the chosen one.

The result of Mrs. Spicer's speculation on the present occasion was less satisfactory than she could have wished, for the conversation between the Doctor and her lodgers was of too general a character for her to gather more than that the young lady was just returned from abroad, and that Mrs. Fowler, who had met her at the coast,

had written to her old friend the Doctor to procure her apartments in London. She learnt that Dr. Cowley had formerly attended a brother of Mrs. Fowler's in his last illness; that the lady was, consequently, grateful to him, and alluded to many other losses of friends, which caused her voice to falter, and the good-natured Doctor to interrupt her quickly, and turn the conversation into another channel.

Miss Fane spoke very little, and Mrs. Fowler a great deal; but nothing that she said added a jot to the information of Mrs. Spicer, who, consequently, descended to the first floor, somewhat disappointed.

“Oh, so you've thought it worth while, ma'am, to come at last to ask how I do this morning,” was the salutation of Mr. Frewen, a small, spare, yellow, cross-looking old man, who did not move from his arm-chair. “I might die in the night, and be found stiff the next, for all the attention I get, or the inquiries that are made after me. I wanted to see you, Madam Spicer, to tell you I mean to give you warning, for to live in a house where there's never any peace with the knocker—where there's neither sleep nor rest at any hour of the night, is more than I can stand. Don't keep answering me—don't be insolent! I'm tired of you and your lodgers, your squalling daughter

and your noisy young men. I shall go away next week.

“Very well, Mr. Frewen,” answered Mrs. Spicer, in a meek, humble tone of voice; “I’m sure it goes to my heart to see you so agitated, and I wouldn’t for all the world have had that transaction happened last night; but it was only a quarter past eleven when the ladies came, and they went up as soft as lambs, for I said to them, there’s a first floor of quality sleeping here, and I’d rather burn the house down than disturb such a generous, kind, mild, good, benevolent gent. as he is.”

“Don’t call me a gent, madam,” returned Mr. Frewen; “I don’t want to be thought a person of quality; I only want to be quiet—I took these lodgings on purpose, and I’m tortured to death. I shall go to Cheltenham next week, and see if I can get a little more attention at the boarding-house than I get here.”

“I’m sure, Mr. Frewen,” said the landlady, preserving her humble tone, “as I said to Maria yesterday, if you was to leave to-morrow, I would n’t let again for a month, in the hope that you’d relent and come back. I never had such a dear, good, considerate lodger that gives no trouble at all, and is always satisfied, and I hope you’ll think better of it.”

“I’m not obliged to be turned out of a place I choose to live in, am I,” said Mr. Frewen, “because you choose to try and ferret me out with noisy women and boys. No: I won’t go—its just what you want, to get rid of me and let to some fine fellow that’ll run off and never pay a farthing. Here, give me my bill—I can pay my way—let me hear no more about it; and another time I warn you if you come up threatening me, I’ll leave your house without another word.”

As Mr. Frewen, without counting up, threw the amount of her bills on the table before her, by which inadvertence on his part Mrs. Spicer was aware that she had made considerable profit on a month’s expenses, she performed her humblest curtsy and withdrew, leaving her cross inmate to the perusal of the *Bengal Hurkaru*, and once more descended to the lower regions.

CHAPTER IV.

Come, let's see the event.—*Twelfth Night.*

CLARA FANE, one of the two ladies who had just taken possession of Mrs. Spicer's second floor, has already been introduced to the reader; her companion, Mrs. Fowler, belonged to that class of personages of which the world is, in a great measure, made up, who fill a corner in the great building so well that they call for no particular observation, because the eye is not struck by any salient point in their character which claims comment, but who yet contribute to the harmony of the whole, and whose absence at their post would occasion a vacuum which could not fail to be felt.

As in a fine piece of music there are only occasional bursts of startling force which tell the better from the level tone of the pleasing re-

mainder, so remarkable personages fix the attention, while quiet characters utter their soft melody unobtrusively, producing a general pleasurable sensation which any attempt to define would be to destroy.

Mrs. Fowler's whole life had been one scene of amiability; she possessed no talents, no genius, had no wit, nor poetry, nor romance in her imagination, and yet circumstances had placed her in situations as singular as if she had been an enthusiast and one who was continually seeking excitement in action.

She had travelled and seen many lands, but not with a view of enjoying their beauties or discovering their history, for she merely accompanied a sick husband to whom she acted as nurse and attendant. After his death she devoted herself to an invalid brother, and subsequently her time had been given to a deformed and ailing sister, with whom she lived retired in the romantic little valley of Llangollen. She had adopted an orphan child, whose education and future fortunes she had undertaken as a benevolent duty, and to whom she gave herself up as she had done throughout her life to everything and everybody who claimed her care.

She appeared never to live for herself, but to have been born to act as a guardian to some

object which required protecting; nor did she ever question the propriety of this abnegation of self, or consider that the time was come when she ought to busy herself with her own comforts.

Her fortune was extremely small, but she had, in the course of her existence, contrived to do more good and relieve more suffering than many of her richer contemporaries who flattered themselves that they possessed power far beyond hers of dispensing relief and patronage.

It had become a saying in the neighbourhood where she resided, that Mrs. Fowler's house was always large enough to accommodate any amount of unexpected guests, that her small stables had room for any number of horses, and her garden could supply any quantity of vegetables or flowers required by her neighbours. Certain it is that her wish and will to oblige and render service was so great that she contrived to overcome difficulties which to many would have been insurmountable, and certain it is, also, that her rectitude of mind supplied her with good judgment and correct appreciation of persons and things denied to many who are gifted with a mind of superior power.

She was rather formal in her manner and precise in her style, but though she was neither poet, musician, nor philosopher, she had a thorough

appreciation of the value of those gifts in others ; her attachments were frequent, and always sincere ; she looked on the bright side of human nature, and no failures had been able to induce her to turn the tapestry. She went on believing and expecting good, and had no place in her mind for the admission of suspicion or distrust.

If Mrs. Spicer had been listening in the bedroom of the back-drawing-room, second-floor, she might have heard the following dialogue between her new lodgers ; and it is not impossible that she was so occupied, as she always bestowed, as has already been observed, much care on the concerns of those under her roof for reasons of her own.

“ My dear Clara,” said Mrs. Fowler, “ you had better sit down at once and answer these advertisements ; I really think out of several one may answer. The lady who wants an accomplished governess for her only child seems just suitable ; answer that first. The lady who wants a good teacher with a Parisian accent, in Derbyshire, might do, we’ll consider of that ; we can write to both these at all events ; neither of them speak of salary, but they do not seem to require such impossibilities as some of our correspondents, who consider, evidently, that an instructress for youth must be a Colossus of learning and able to exist on the pleasure of teaching alone.

“Since you are determined to start for yourself in the world, dear girl, I must do what you desire, but you know our home at Llangollen is always yours when you require it, and a joy it will always be to my sister and me when you return to us.”

“Yes I know that perfectly, dearest Mrs. Fowler,” returned Clara, kissing her companion affectionately, “and if I did not I should not start with such a light heart, for not to come back to you and Llangollen would be the grief of my life. But, consider, ever since I came a poor little outcast stranger from dear nurse, Susey Love, to your hospitable roof, I have been your child and have had two mothers to atone for the early loss of my own. I have found friends wherever your kind care has sent me; in Paris those darling Petits have made all my studies delight, and now I am certain I shall be quite happy in my new situation. You know how fond I am of adventures and incidents, and you know too that I feel if I do not like it I can always run away to Langollen, and be as happy as a queen.”

“You have so much energy and genius, Clara,” replied Mrs. Fowler, coughing to hide a rising emotion; “that you have more than the usual chances of success in life. Your beginning has

been rude but fortune will, I fondly trust, do much for you in future."

"Fortune is a fickle fair, dear Mrs. Fowler," said Clara, gaily, "and must be wooed to be won. I have, as you know too well, a train of romantic aspirations always following me and exciting my mind and I never intend to chase them away, for they amuse and console me at all times when the reality looks too dull. In spite of your reproofs for my castle building I am always making new towers and wings to my fancy structure and at all events if it falls down, I have materials for a new one which it is a pity not to use. Now I never will give up my notions of the future, which are these. See if I am not a good prophet: I shall meet with more very amiable people, very like the Petits; I shall hear by some strange mode of my father and discover my mother. I shall be acknowledged, be rich, be prosperous, provide for nurse Susey, and—"

"Stop Clara—stop," exclaimed Mrs. Fowler, "if you do not write the letters there will be no foundation for your castle—you must acknowledge so much, so pray begin without loss of time."

Clara instantly ceased talking and set herself to business in earnest, and the two letters she then wrote brought two answers in the course of time which made her acquainted with two persons

of very different character, both of whom exercised an influence on her future destiny, thus proving that Clara's philosophy had something in it.

Mrs. Frillet, whose letter was the first answered, stopped her brougham in Poland Street a few days after she had received and replied to Clara's communication. It was a very elegant brougham and was attended by a very delicate page. Mrs. Frillet was a very delicate person, covered up with soft shawls and ermine cloaks, and was assisted by the delicate page to alight, and then mounted the dingy stairs to Mrs. Spicer's second floor very condescendingly and took her seat on the little hard sofa very cosily, beginning at once on business without pause.

"My dear young lady," said she, in a voice so soft as scarcely to be heard, looking benignly at Clara, "you see I have come myself to answer your advertisement for I adore adventures, and I thought a drive would do me good. I hope we shall come to a happy decision and that I shall receive you under my roof very shortly. I like your letter of all things and I am quite satisfied that you are full of accomplishments. I see in your face that you are *sensible* and *pleine de bonté*. I want a friend as much as my beloved Dorine requires a governess—come to Rose Cottage and see us—your friend," she added, bowing to Mrs.

Fowler, "will come with you, we will talk things over there as I must not stay, the air of a close London street would overpower me soon. With your grace and delicacy I am sure you will be charmed with Rose Cottage and delighted to quit so uncongenial an atmosphere as this. I who have passed many of my sunniest years in an eastern clime and have experienced the delight of refinement in all its bearings, can really hardly breathe out of a perfumed atmosphere. When one has not been in India, one has seen nothing—every other part of the world is flat and insipid in comparison; but I have a pretty retreat. Your aunt, or mamma, or friend will like my house too—I am charmed to make her acquaintance and your's. Can you come the day after to-morrow? say yes—I will send my carriage for you—I live on the beautiful banks of the flowery Thames in the sweetest seclusion. I can hear you play then and you will see Dorine—a perfect angel—they call her the image of her mother—perhaps she is like me—you will judge. We will spend a day of enjoyment at first, and talk of business at the end of it—adieu my dear unknown friend, a sympathy tells me we shall be united in soul. Your protectress is more grave—it should be so—the contrast is better—we shall form a charming *société*. I depend on you—adieu."

All this little talk had been carried on in a soft whisper, occasionally interrupted by the replies of Clara or Mrs. Fowler in monosyllables, for the little lady who spoke was as rapid in her utterance as gentle in her tone; she seemed to have a continual struggle to suppress her loquacity and confine it within the bounds of approved refinement which she considered herself to have attained in the low tone of her voice.

Unable to resist the invitation thus amiably given, and not unwilling to accept it, Clara and Mrs. Fowler remained, after she had taken leave, and been conveyed into her downy brougham and driven off, struck with surprise at the singularity of the adventure.

“It will be really delightful,” said Clara, “to go and spend the day on the ‘banks of the flowery Thames’—and gaze ‘all up the silver Thames and all adown;’ but how odd of her to ask us, perfect strangers as we are.”

“It does seem strange,” replied Mrs. Fowler; but I dare say London manners are very different from country habits, and you and I are only acquainted with the latter. We may as well go and judge for ourselves of Mrs. Frillet’s establishment—Dr. Cowley perhaps will know who she is—we can ask him when he comes to-day.”

“At all events, this you must acknowledge,

dear Mrs. Fowler," said Clara; "is a singular beginning for a governess. I wonder what Dorine is like; if she resembles her mother she speaks like a cooing dove."

At this moment Maria opened, the door introducing another visitor in the person of Mrs. Trumble, who announced herself as the lady who required a teacher in her school in Derbyshire. Mrs. Trumble offered a striking contrast to the delicate little Mrs. Frillet, for she was a broad, stout, old lady with a red face and large nose which seemed to possess a flexibility so remarkable that it expressed her feelings as vividly as another person's eyes might do, being agitated by every emotion and variable both as to colour and form according to the sentiments she experienced. Mrs. Trumble, though the mistress of an establishment for young ladies, attended chiefly to the domestic department and seldom found any inconvenience from the remarkably original pronunciation in which she indulged, as she was not called upon to exert her powers in other ways than in carving at the school table, and attending to the numerous details of a large house filled with young inmates from all the villages and small towns round about Bakewell, for it was at that place that Vernon House, the most popular school in the county was situated.

Able assistants imparted knowledge to the pupils, at the head of whom, as she related to the two ladies whom she now visited, was one of extraordinary capacity and power, her partner, quite a wonder of erudition and quite a treasure designed by nature for a school.

“Now you see, Miss,” said Mrs. Trumble, addressing Clara, “we have plenty of good teachers but we want one as knows the French quite off-hand and can play and sing well, for our farmer’s daughters is all brought up as elegant as possible and can afford to pay pretty well, and their Pas likes them to have the best of educations as can be given: and as for music, Miss Giles, herself, my partner, is a first rate hand at that and knows the other things too, but can’t be expected to teach all, as she’s one of the heads and has money in the concern. So, if you are willing to take my situation I would like you better than any of the many ladies I have seen and you can come down with me next week when I go back. It can be for six month’s trial if you like and I am sure you’ll stay and like to; we’re very comfortable up in Derbyshire and quite friendly.”

The terms proposed by Mrs. Trumble were scarcely in accordance with the picture she had

presented of the rich farmers of the country, but the prospect she drew of all the advantages to be found beneath her roof, made the offer rather a tempting one. Mrs. Fowler, after telling her that she had a visit to pay to a lady with whom they were in treaty, begged to be allowed to defer her decision until the event had occurred, and they parted with that understanding.

On the appointed day, and at the appointed hour, the brougham of Mrs. Frillet stopped at the dingy door in Poland Street, and the spectacles of Mrs. Spicer, peering over her low blind, immediately conveyed to the wearer of them the perception that it was arrived.

“Well,” said she to Maria, “here it is, and my up-stairses will go out, sure enough, in that very carriage that brought that odd, little woman the other day: if it hadn’t been for Frewen ringing I should have heard all about the visit, but just as she got in he must bother for his fire, and I was obliged to go out of the back room. Didn’t you get anything out of the young lady about it, Maria?”

“Oh,” said Maria, who was drumming away at her stony piano, trying to accompany herself in a new song, “I quite forgot to pump, as you told me, when I went up last night, for Miss Fane gave me this pretty German air—and she sang

me the tune—she has such a sweet voice—ten times sweeter than Celia's. Do, ma, listen to it—Wybrow will so like it !”

“Do leave off your squalling, Maria,” cried her mother, “and run up and tell them the carriage is here. I'll just step out and talk to the young man till they come.”

As she spoke Mrs. Spicer opened the parlour door, and as Maria mounted the stairs humming “Weine, weine !” she threw open the street door and in a bland voice addressed the small page who stood in attendance—

“Well, my young man,” said she, insinuatingly, “so you have come to fetch the ladies—they'll soon be down—would you like to take a drop of something? I dare say you've had a long ride this morning—its a good way to—I forget where your missis lives?”

But the small page only bowed and smiled, and his answer being a hopeless “Plait il? madame.” Mrs. Spicer was fain to give up the attack, for glancing at the coachman she observed that he sat immoveable on his box, as if he were part of the machine, only to be moved when his horses were put in motion.

“They're foreigners too !” said she, in a disappointed tone, as she returned to her blind and watched the party as they got into the carriage ;

“’tis very odd the Doctor knows so little of ’em. I’ll ferret it out, somehow, however. What has this fine carriage to do with advertising for a governess’s place? and that I heard with my own ears.”

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CHAPTER V.

“Se sentir heureux : voila le but de la vie : peu importe les routes par lesquelles on y parvient.”

Sophie Gay.

THE summer aspect of Rose Cottage was extremely attractive, for it stood in the midst of a velvet lawn, sloping down to the banks of the Thames, which it reached, uninterrupted by railing or boundary of any kind, but dipped its gentle banks into the crystal water, and laved its long-leaved willows in the glassy mirror, without fear of intruding cockneys, for on each side of the small domain a wheel-shaped palissade guarded the grounds from stranger's feet, and, except in a boat, the lawn could not be reached.

Clumps of trees of graceful shape, twined with flowering creepers, which clung to the stems and boughs, were scattered here and there amidst the verdure and trellices of aromatic shrubs and flowers, formed bowers and temples in different

retreats, while ancient, lofty trees of the freest growth, crowded behind the house and shut it completely from view of the road behind, as if it stood in an isolated wood, far from the haunts of men.

A fountain, surrounded by pots of hothouse flowers, at this early time of the year, threw up its jets into the clear blue sky, and fell into a basin filled with gold fishes that glittered in the sun of May.

Behind the house, at some distance in the midst of a flower garden, dividing it from a spacious kitchen garden, screened by a high wall covered with creeping plants, extended a green house filled with orange trees and all their tropical brethren waiting in that retreat till the heat of the sun allowed them to breathe the open air. In the centre of this green house was a sort of pavilion, fitted up with sofas and tables and covered with that variegated India matting which yields a perfume to the foot that presses it; lamps of alabaster hung suspended from the dome ceiling which, when lighted on a summer evening, cast upon the groups of flowers piled up to their height a gentle gleam suited to their delicate natures, and a fountain in a distant recess murmured through shells and fell over steps of marble into a vase supported by Cupids.

The house itself was like most of those fancy residences which ornament the banks of the Thames, the architecture of which is something vague, between a Norman cottage and a Grecian temple, presenting to the eye thatched roofs and projecting gables, trellised windows and pillared arcades, all extremely incongruous and extremely enjoyable, and though, it may be, calling for reprobation from a precise artist, yet capable of affording much delight to a summer idler; all its deformities and absurdities being beautifully concealed by heaps of flowers and screens of leafy fragrance.

Within, as without, all was gay and attractive to the eye: nothing magnificent, but every object selected with art, and formed to amuse a butterfly taste which demanded graceful contours and sparkling forms.

There were pictures on the walls but none of a severe character; most of them water colour sketches of lively scenes, and miniatures and flower paintings; there was plenty of looking-glass reflecting vistas of white silk draperies held back by rose-coloured bands—and no want of china and gilded vases in the small but numerous rooms, opening one out of another and covered with velvet-soft carpets and lighted by ranges of long windows opening to the gay garden without.

The carriage which conveyed Clara and Mrs. Fowler to Rose Cottage drove up to an entrance in a little wood behind, and they were introduced through a long conservatory into a room fitted up with green drapery and roses as if arrayed for a fête.

Mrs. Frillet, fantastically dressed in green with a chaplet of rosebuds on her head, came forward to meet them; they scarcely recognised in her their visitor in Poland Street, so much younger and more *debonaire* did she appear. She was still pretty and art had carefully repaired the charms which time had somewhat deteriorated, so that, at the first glance and in a dim light, she might be taken for much younger than she was.

She did not speak, but after embracing them, she tripped to an open pianoforte where she seated herself, and throwing back her ringlets raised her eyes affectedly, as if inspired, and sang in recitative to her own accompaniment, which was not without skill, the following words:—

“Fair spirits, welcome to our fairy bower—we greet you well—forget the dull cold world and for a time consent to dwell amongst us.”

Although Mrs. Fowler stood in a state of bewildered amazement at this scene, it was different with Clara, who was so great an enthusiast in music that she at once forgot the circumstances

in which she stood and her mind excited and her imagination warmed by the originality of her new acquaintance, she felt that all common modes of salutation were out of the question and stepping a little forward replied in a recitative, accompanying with great correctness the chords which the little lady continued to play.

“We come as pilgrims to an unknown region, and stand amazed amidst the fairy people.”

“Admirable! charming!” exclaimed the player, jumping up; “you are exactly the person we wanted.”

So saying she rang a small bell, when two female attendants, also dressed in green, though not so fantastically as their mistress, entered and disembarrassed the visitors of their cloaks.

“Now follow the Queen of Fairies,” cried their hostess; “follow, follow, follow me! that I may introduce you to our king who will be charmed at the new acquaintances I bring him.”

She led the way, warbling as she went, into another room where, at a window, with his back towards them, stood a tall, elegant-looking man, of middle age, who scarcely seemed to notice their entrance.

“He is, as usual, abstracted,” said their conductress; “we must draw him from himself. Sit down, fair Syren,” she continued, addressing

Clara, "and charm him with some melody—he hates formality—it will be the best introduction."

"Excuse me," said Clara, shrinking back; "I am quite unable to sing before a perfect stranger."

"He is unhappy and there is a gloom on his mind which music helps to dissipate. You are too kind to refuse," whispered the little lady.

Clara looked towards the gentleman and observed the extreme sadness of his countenance which plainly told that he suffered. There was something noble and dignified in his bearing, and she felt an instant wish to afford him a pleasure which she could not but be aware she possessed the means of imparting, for her musical powers were of the first order. She accordingly, although with some embarrassment, took her place at a piano-forte and struck a few chords. The gentleman started and appeared to become instantly aware of their presence, but he did not move from his place.

Clara, who watched his movements, continued to play. She chose a favourite German air to which she gave peculiar expression, and the delicacy of her touch and the taste she displayed at once attracted all the attention of the stranger, who was evidently an enthusiast. He approached the instrument and seated himself near it while

Mrs. Frillet threw herself on a sofa near and coiled her pretty little form round, as if in a nest amongst the cushions.

Presently the gentleman drew near her and in a low tone seemed to be making inquiries.

“They are the new acquaintances I told you of,” said the queen of the fairies; “that charming girl is called Clara.”

The gentleman resumed his position and when Clara had finished playing he took her hand with a benevolent expression, and thanked her very cordially for her courtesy and kindness.

“Do not think me encroaching,” said he, “if I entreat you to sing; it is long since I was so delighted, and I see that you are a lover, as well as myself, of music.”

Without hesitation and pleased at his manner, Clara began another symphony, and again she chose a German air, accompanying the music this time with her voice, at the request of the listener.

Again and again, as her song finished, the gentlemen entreated her to continue, till at length he started, and leading her away, exclaimed:—

“Is it possible that selfishness can be carried so far! not another note.”

“You have studied the language of the Father Land,” said he, “while they were seated at a

table covered with refreshments, and attended only by the same two damsels in green whom they had first seen.

“You have read the poets of the land of Minnesingers, fair Clara, I need not ask; but have you been in Germany?”

“No,” replied Clara; “nor do I feel a great anxiety to go there; I fear my dreams would be dispelled. My imagination pictured the Germans as a dreamy people full of poetry and philosophy, but I have heard them described as coarse, heavy and uninteresting.”

“You have heard that from their enemies, the volatile French; it is true that they are a solid, stolid people,” returned he, “and appear at first sight to have little taste except in music; they do not understand, they cannot feel painting; they cling to the alphabet of art, taught them by their first masters, certainly marvels of their time and country, but still only the youngest of Nature’s pupils; they like colour and feel not form; they cherish truth, but it is apt to be, with them, common, coarse fact, for as yet they know not ideality in art, they keep themselves too much down to earth. They daub their houses with hideous frescos; they plaster their palaces with gold on brickdust grounds; with paint and decorations they spoil their fine architecture; with needless

ornament they spoil their pictures; but look at their poetry and music! they are a great but savage people making a struggle after a longer bondage to ignorance than other nations, and they have a soul within which will blaze forth through all their mistakes. They have no good modern painters, but their one sculptor, their Swanthaler, is a host in himself, enough to regenerate a world of bad artists. He can do anything, he is a severer, perhaps a purer, Canova, a Danneker, a Thorwaldson, or at least worthy to follow them."

"I feel the merits of pictures rather than of statues," said Clara. "I think the mind must be educated for admiration of that great art."

"Perhaps so," was the reply; "a statue is a picture without colour, an engraving embodied; the purer because it is without ornament, it is the Psyche of Art, not superior in beauty but equal to the Cupid, and more ethereal. You must go to Italy."

"That is my great ambition, but not likely to be gratified," said Clara, smiling. "I am just returned from abroad and shall stay long in England now."

"You are come from Paris!" said her questioner; "you have seen the gayest, the pleasantest, the most amusing city in the world to live in. But Paris is the extinguisher of sentiment, ro-

mance, taste and hope, and of principle, too," he added, sadly. "In Germany all is future, in Italy all is past, in France all is *present*, and the present is not enough for the mind of man. What is the present? where is it? it is gone while we name it, the future lives, the past is immortal, let us pursue both, let us fly from the present and its deceits."

"Dear brother," said Mrs. Frillet, "now you know I live entirely for the present and enjoy it, as you most assuredly do—particularly at this moment. Is it not so?"

"No," replied her brother, "I am thinking even now of the past of a few moments, the fair Clara's songs, and of the future, when she shall sing again. The present moment gives us merely the food of our bodies."

"Which is necessary to sustain the mind you speak of," returned Mrs. Frillet, "therefore, pray help Mrs. Fowler to something more."

"Would," said the host playfully, "pleasurable as is the sensation of tasting exquisite viands, would that we were creatures who could live on thought or air; why can we not exist by inhaling perfumes: there is doubtless some essence which renews life and suspends pain. Depend on it, the secret will at length be found of the marvellous elixir which will do this. We have made great

strides towards the discovery recently, and shall arrive at last at the wished for conclusion."

"But will this elixir preserve youth as well as life?" asked Clara. "If not, it would be a sad gift."

"It will renew youth and preserve it," returned the gentleman, "otherwise you justly say it would be a sad gift, for life unenjoyed is void, and, without health and youth, to enjoy it is impossible."

"Do you think man was then made for enjoyment alone?" said Mrs. Fowler gravely; "have you never observed that enjoyment is rather a name than a fact, and that toil and sorrow, privation and want, are the natural lot of human beings."

"Madam," answered the host with equal gravity, "all the human race is condemned to suffering: we suffer at our birth and till our death, but we have equal capacity to enjoy, and if we watched the happy moments we might attain it much oftener than we do. Our notion of Heaven is that it is all happiness, and that happiness is reflected here below in a thousand shapes evanescent, but capable of being arrested if sought for:—

'Sometimes the wine, sometimes the cup, I call thee.'

The image of celestial joy shines in a lovely face and in a beautiful landscape, in a flower and in a leaf, in a clear stream and on an icy mountain. I have sought it everywhere and am seeking it always."

"And you, at last," said Clara smiling, "seem to have found it in this charming retreat, where all is beauty and grace."

"It is never stationary," returned the host, "you must pursue it. I shall remain here on the banks of this flowing river as long as it stays with me. I feel at once the struggles it makes to free its wings, and when once it flies I follow."

"You have wealth and power to do so," said Mrs. Fowler, "but what are those to do who cannot pursue the phantom?"

The host did not reply but by ringing a silver bell near him, and, at the signal, a tapestry was drawn up, and the suite of rooms formerly described were exhibited to view. The strangers were led through these and the host presented a rose to Clara with an air of grave courtesy which suited the majestic style of his figure and the classical character of his head and features. Clara was struck by observing that not a book was to be seen in any room in the house, nor was there any indication of the inhabitants, no signs of children or childish occupation, and at length

she ventured to ask Mrs. Frillet if the little Dorine, her future pupil, were to be presented to them.

Mrs. Frillet put her finger on her lip. "I will tell you," said she, "when the hour of business arrives ; we are only now to think of amusing ourselves."

"But," hazarded Clara, "I have no right to enjoy your kind hospitality without bestowing a thought on my duties, for such I hope to undertake in the instruction of your little daughter."

"Do you remember that Psyche," said Mrs. Frillet, "who had nothing to desire yet she wished for the only thing kept from her. Look, here she stands in the marble of Canova, smiling a warning to you."

Clara was silent, but when in the retirement of their chamber at night she sat by Mrs. Fowler, and they talked over the adventure of the day, she indulged freely in expressions of surprise.

"I am quite as much astonished as you," said Mrs. Fowler, "at the whole affair, and begin to think we are really in a fairy palace or are dreaming. Your romantic notions are more likely to be realized here than my grave fears at the probable privations you would meet in your new career ; but here all is sunshine without shade, and but that the little Dorine appears

invisible, I should congratulate you on your good fortune."

"Our host," said Clara, "seems the only person in the house besides our hostess and the green attendants. How fairy-like, yet how exquisite our dinner was served by them! yet Paris must surely have furnished the cooks that provided it. How beautifully the invisible musicians played during the repast! There must be magic in all this. Suppose we were prisoners in an enchanted castle and unable to escape? I really begin to fear it. We have not even heard our host's name. I wonder who and what he is, besides a rich man. He is much older than his sister, but not like her in any way; for she is simply affected, while he is grave and philosophic in the midst of his fantasies. I am quite content, however, to wait the result of this adventure since we can do nothing by striving."

"I think you mistake about his age," replied Mrs. Fowler, "he is so tall and grand-looking, that he looks older, I imagine, than he really is. At times I fancy him quite young: it is the occasional gravity of his deportment that gives him years. I am puzzled about that, as in all other ways—but let us sleep upon it, and perhaps to-morrow may enlighten us."

They accordingly retired to their several

couches in two niches filled with looking-glass and shaded with draperies of gold-coloured satin, richer than any they had seen below stairs. The ceiling of the chamber was tent-shaped, the centre being a mirror, from the midst of which hung a small lamp of gold and alabaster, dimly lighted and shaded by a transparent screen of silk, so as to shed the softest light through the room.

“How unlike, said Clara, “as she took leave of Mrs. Fowler for the night, “our shabby bed and faded curtains in our dingy rooms in Poland Street!”

“Life is made up of contrasts,” replied her guardian, “and this is one of the most curious.”

CHAPTER VI.

“If we love because we find one another amiable, ought we to be blamed for it? Let Destiny bear the blame.”

Arabian Nights.

THE next day was an agreeable though clouded day, and it was passed in rambles in the beautiful but somewhat confined grounds, in examining pictures, and in conversation, and the evening seemed to arrive almost suddenly upon them, so pleasant had been the hours.

At dinner their party was added to by the arrival of a new guest, who entered unannounced, and, as it would seem, unnoticed—a circumstance which surprised Mrs. Fowler, who, indeed, was thrown into a state of complete astonishment at all she saw. Clara imagined that the new comer, no doubt, formed a part of this singular family, but as no one's name was mentioned she was altogether in the dark.

The stranger was a tall, handsome, and very distinguished young man, and appeared to be perfectly at his ease and at home, not only in the society of her hosts but in her own, for he occasionally addressed his conversation to her, as if continuing some theme they had formerly discussed.

The host and his young friend talked a good deal of general subjects, and after the whole party had adjourned to the drawing-room, the same animated discussions were continued, the remarks of the younger personage being sometimes tinged with something that approached levity in their extreme nonchalance: he occasionally appeared inclined to throw off all the trammels of gravity and assume the most childish manner, but whether in compliment to herself or Mrs. Frillet Clara could not determine.

She was seated alone for a few moments near a window, when he suddenly approached and pausing, gazed so fixedly upon her that she almost shrunk from his expression.

“When did you arrive?” said he suddenly, with a peculiar meaning in his tone.

“I arrived here yesterday,” replied Clara.

“I mean, when from France?” said he in the same manner.

“A few weeks since,” answered she, surprised at the *brusquerie* of his questioning.

He turned away, without further rejoinder and went on with a conversation he had interrupted hastily with his friend.

The host shortly afterwards came and seated himself near her.

“They tell me you like France,” said he; “I do not wonder at it, at your age; it is a country that pleases the young.”

“I like it for the sake of friends there,” said Clara; “I know very little of the country itself.”

“The French,” continued the host, “are the most extraordinary people in the world; they have more genius, more perseverance, more learning, more talent, than all other nations combined. Look at their literature at the present moment—they publish every year nearly two thousand works on every sort of subject, grave and gay. Indeed the world runs a chance of being overwhelmed with books, for since the four hundred years ago which gave us printing the equilibrium of the globe has been said to be put in peril, and the French contribute the greatest share of this encumbrance.”

Clara smiled as she observed, “I cannot but see that you have a distaste for books in your fairy dwelling here, for I discover none in any part.”

“Certainly not,” returned the host, “I prefer studying men. I am like the Persian lover who

exclaims to his companions who come to him for instruction, 'burn your books if you wish to study with me : the science I follow is not to be taught by reading.' ”

Books are the bane of life; they either give too much light or throw too much shadow. I read sometimes nevertheless, but when I do I banish man—they do not blend well. There are two worlds, one of observation, the other of imitation. They who read too much think too little of themselves. But to return to our neighbours the clever and enterprising French. They are the best architects in Europe as we the English are the worst.”

“They know also,” interposed the stranger guest, “how to furnish work for artists better than any other nation in the world, for no sooner do they arrive at perfection than they destroy their works of art in some popular *émeute* and all their men of genius have to set to work again.”

Then changing his manner altogether—“My sweet fairy queen,” whispered the speaker to Mrs. Frillet, at whose feet he sat and who was occupying her fingers in modelling some wax, “you seem not to have caught the expression you are trying for, give it me, see this I am sure is the character at once.” And as he spoke he twisted the wax into the semblance of a grotesque head which

appeared to Mrs. Frillet so striking a chance resemblance of the person intended to be represented that she threw herself back on the sofa in irrepressible amusement.

“My king, my judge,” cried the stranger holding up his performances, behold him—behold the conjugal portrait, it is I am convinced done to the life. Alas! that such a husband should be far away over seas mourned by his dove!—here is a prettier subject and as like.”

In a moment he had modelled a small bust with the features of Clara caricatured but extremely pretty and too like to be mistaken. Without addressing or noticing her he handed it to the host who received it with a pleased look, and the artist then coiling himself amongst the cushions began to warble in a fine clear tone, making the echoes of the chamber answer to the loud sweetness.

Mrs Fowler, whose curiosity was roused, could not now forbear asking Mrs Frillet to name the new guest.

“We are,” said she, “in a singular state of ignorance yours is, in fact, the only name we are acquainted with and we cannot even address our kind host whom you call only the King of the Fairies.”

“Cease, cease, my dear friend,” replied the

lady of the wreath, "and know that a thorough knowledge of anything is the height of folly. We are all in that happy state of uncertainty which reaches the sublime: of what consequence to any of us can it be to know each other's names; we are all pleased with each other for the time and if we knew more the illusion might be dispelled. You and your Clara are the most favoured, perhaps, in speculating upon us, and I, the least, who know that you have reached us from a great city of smoke: we at least appear to you ethereal—remain in this blissful cloud and fancy us as immaterial as we profess to be."

"You are right," joined in the guest who was listening to their conversation "never read a title page or look at a play bill, never ask the name of a person or a place; leave all to hazard and you will be spared many a vexation from which we are exempt; know only that you are in the presence of the grand master and mistress of the passive joy and see others of our band have joined us."

As he spoke, from various entrances appeared groups of personages in costumes of the most singular kind; no one saluted the master or mistress, but all fell as it were noiselessly into their places on different sofas and cushions, and a soft murmur spread itself through the rooms like

the cooing of doves or the rustling of the trains of peacocks.

Clara found herself sometimes joining one group, sometimes another, no one looked at her as a stranger and all conversed from time to time on art or taste, as if they were quite aware that, being there, she was formed to understand them. The novelty of the whole scene delighted Clara so much that she whispered to Mrs. Fowler when she rejoined her, after wandering through all the rooms—

“This appears to me to be really society in its purity: there is neither scandal nor inquisitiveness, neither boldness nor bashfulness: every one is instructed, every one is able to converse on some agreeable subject all foreign to the present company or scene. It is like a party of shades met in the fields of Elysium, capable of enjoyment without noise or confusion, each assisting the other and all intent only on gliding smoothly along the tranquil vale of life.”

“You think then we have succeeded in our attempt to realize a passive state of enjoyment,” said the host, who had overheard her and who seemed to possess an ubiquity of person, for he was to be seen whenever a pause was made.

“You think we have reached a certain degree of perfection; I am glad of it; we have the

merit of novelty in our *reunions*. London or Paris parties are a medley of music, heat, and fatigue—mistakes quite unsuitable to rational and educated persons. It is better when one wishes for this sort of enjoyment to seek it in the streets amongst the populace for there it has its merits: no sort of enjoyment is to be despised, but it must be chosen judiciously; the lowest has its charm sometimes, but we must occasionally seek for the highest. Of late, society has made such fearful descents that it has reached its *acmé* and must rise to exist.'

"What a world this were if it could last!" said Clara musing,—“but this is merely shadow, the substance of existence is heavy and sinks: this dream-land can not have being long at the foot of a volcano.”

“When the eruption comes it must take its way” answered the Grand Master of Passive Joy—“it is useless to flee from it, but it is possible to forget it.”

“You are of the same mind as that gay Italian society who concealed themselves in flower gardens from the plague—one must cease to have affections or interests if one would enjoy this sort of life.” said Clara.

“I have survived both,” replied the host, without a change of tone: but so saying he withdrew.

“There is after all,” said Clara, sighing, “more sorrow than joy in all this: it is only acting happiness.”

“There is no real happiness,” said a voice near, “it exists only as we resolve to make it: turbulence of any kind destroys it: all passions disturb it—

‘Seat yourself by a pleasant stream and mark how life glides along—go not to the borders of the sea in a storm to watch the wrecks that will presently strew the shore.’”

“But friendship? but affection?” said Clara, —“is life worth anything without these?”

“Or love?—you would ask,” returned the person who spoke, who was no other than the wax-modeller—“love is a charm and an enjoyment in its commencement—but beware of its end. Keep love always young, let it be for ever at its beginning; I, for instance, feel it now for you and am happy; you feel it for no one as yet, and are happy in your tranquillity: I would rather from this time never behold you again, or hear your voice because, you would be less charming to me the second time than the first, and the third or fourth perhaps even you would become indifferent to me.”

Clara could not help feeling startled at this singular avowal, so oddly made, but, resolving to lend herself to the whim of the hour, she answered,

“But it is said that the hopes and fears of love lend it its chief charm—the present can afford neither: you mistake however in calling self-satisfaction love.”

“You understand the subject,” replied the guest, rather maliciously and forgetting for an instant the passive tone assumed by the society, which however he instantly resumed. “I understand it, however, better and am content to lead you. We have no concealments here, for all is innocence and truth amongst us. I have said I love you because I believe in sympathy, and that has drawn us together: why did not the Grand Master talk to you on this subject, and why did you not lead to it as you did to me? because there is not sympathy equal to ours between you two—you are not displeased although you blush; we shall never be disunited in idea from henceforth; we are supposed to be the greatest, perhaps the only positive strangers in the room, and yet sympathy has led us to meet. It is true we have already met before, and depend on it we cannot now be released the one from the other.”

“You are mistaken,” said Clara, laughing in spite of herself; “we never could have met before, but you are already preparing to disturb the tranquil happiness you spoke of, if you indeed speak the truth in asserting that a second and

third interview ruins the pleasure found in the first."

"There are some exceptions," said the stranger, unable to repress a laugh, which responded to her own, but immediately resuming the soft calm tone of his former conversation. "We shall however," said he, "not meet again for some time and then in so different a position that the novelty of the scene will make our next interview equal to a first."

"How can you tell this," said Clara; "are the members of the Order of Passive Enjoyment prophets?"

"Some of them," replied he; "alas! when our host quits England the pageant will be dispelled."

"What! will he leave the Paradise he has created?" cried Clara.

"He can create another—this is not the first he has formed," was the answer; "nothing is Paradise that lasts long; this has existed some time, and what assures me that it will be dispelled is that to-night you have disturbed the reign of passive enjoyment."

"I had no intention of doing so," said Clara, "nor do I believe that I have the power."

"You have done so—and will continue to do so. I shall be unable in future to live without

you and shall seek you wherever you are to be found.”

As the strange guest said this, Clara turned away somewhat uncomfortable at the turn his conversation was taking. She sought Mrs. Fowler immediately and her grave looks convinced her that something had occurred not quite in accordance with the harmony of the rest of the evening.

The guests departed as they came, apparently disappearing at their own will, without comment or salutation, and Clara observed that from the time she had turned away from her admiring companion she had seen him no more.

On the third day, the brougham took back the strangers to Poland Street; the green attendants had announced it to them and declined replying to their questions respecting their host, who did not appear. They could only therefore submit to the singular whims of these fairy people and await the result in their very different domicile in Poland Street. The hope, however, that Clara had entertained of obtaining a situation evaporated fast.

CHAPTER VII.

Why vanish you away? or is my sense
Deluded by my hope!

Habington.

“MY dear madam,” said Dr. Cowley, “what you tell me of your adventure on the banks of the Thames is almost incredible: but that the brougham you speak of, the page, and the lady, have been actually seen by the eyes of Mrs. Spicer, my worthy friend below, I must conclude that Miss Clara’s imaginative mind has invented a romance which she has related so vividly to you that you believe yourself to have been an actor in the scenes she describes. I have been to Richmond, to Twickenham, to Isleworth, and several places along the river, and I see no such fairy palace as you talk of; unless, indeed, it be the Rose Cottage which is to let—a pretty place with lawns reaching to the edge of the water.”

“That is the place,” cried Clara; “but you must be dreaming yourself, Doctor, to talk of its being to let; it is not ten days since we were there, and the happiness our host was seeking could not have flown away so quickly as that.”

“I speak advisedly,” replied Dr. Cowley; “I am by no means a poetical personage, I leave that to other charming people who can throw dust in the eyes of the most severe: not only is Rose Cottage to let, but to let unfurnished, and nothing but bare walls now remain of all your pageant. Mr. Grimford’s friend Hogg, the auctioneer, has the selling of the pictures and furniture; I wonder I doubted it to be the same, but I could scarcely fancy your invention went so far as to people this retreat with a philosopher, a fairy, a—”

“How provoking you are, Dr. Cowley,” said Clara, “all I have told Mrs. Fowler knows to be true; but it seems, at all events, I have lost my situation; *la petite* Dorine is the only phantom of the affair, and she concerned me most.”

“It is rather a mysterious business it must be confessed,” said the Doctor, “and I wish I could give you any advice on the subject. As far as regards Mrs. Trumble you will be safe, for I know her family and that she is the person she represents herself to be. Your friends at Twickenham, I conclude, since they are not illusions,

are adventurers, who are gone to seek amusement elsewhere."

"If they were adventurers," said Clara, laughing, "they would have run away without paying their debts; have you any evidence that they have done so?"

"You are a perfect lawyer, Miss Fane," replied Dr. Cowley, "and judge rightly. I confess to have heard nothing of the sort, therefore I suppose one must conclude them to be purely eccentric."

"It was a strange idea to make us the victims of their eccentricity," observed Mrs. Fowler; "they have caused us to lose our time and now there is little left to decide in."

"I have already decided," said Clara, "to accept the offer of Mrs. Trumble and go to Derbyshire to instruct the farmer's daughters."

Dr. Cowley smiled. "I fear," said he, "that you decide hastily; with your manners and accomplishments you ought to meet with something better than that; but if you think it well to attempt it for a time, my friends to whom I have spoken, may be watching for a superior position, and you can remove to it when it occurs."

"I am not difficult to please," said Clara, "and I daresay the air of Derbyshire will suit me very well. I will write to Mrs. Trumble and

tell her so at once. Do not look grave my dear Mrs. Fowler and imagine that I am going to be a martyr; although my first dream has been so rudely dispelled perhaps my next may turn out better."

It was in consequence of this decision that Clara was engaged to accompany Mrs. Trumble into the country in a few days, and Mrs. Fowler prepared to return to her home and her sister at Llangollen. She sent for Mrs. Spicer to apprise her of her intended departure, who uttered many lamentations on so soon losing them.

"I'm sure," said she, "poor Maria will be so sorry, for she's taken such a fancy to your niece—niece isn't she, ma'am?—oh, I beg pardon, I thought I heard miss call you aunt—everybody knows their own affairs best. It's Maria's birthday to-morrow, and we give a little *feat* always on the occasion: I assure you, though I am but a poor widow, and my poor, dear husband had a place under government and caught his death in his functions, I've the most genteel visitors, quite gentlefolks, and you need not be ashamed if you would do us the honour to step down in the course of the evening. We have just a cake and a lobster for supper, and her godpapa, Mr. Grimsford—I believe, between you and I, but I shouldn't like it to be known, you know, that he

means to leave her something, he's so rich though he's a little near—he gives the wine—some beautiful currant that's sent him from the North. Celia Sawyer's coming, and she's quite genteel and elegant, and our medical students promise to look in. We shall have a little singing, and Mr. Brown will sing his comic songs—it's as good as being at the play to hear him. Dr. Cowley is sure to pop in, he always does, so I hope you will condescend to visit us at our little *galey*."

It was difficult to escape from this civility, and Mrs. Fowler accordingly accepted for herself and Clara.

Although neither Mrs. Fowler nor Clara had any inclination to join the "party in the parlour" they prepared for the descent at the appointed time when they were summoned by Maria herself who, with extreme delight, ushered them into the chamber which was destined to receive their guests.

The piano-forte, though not quite so grand as that at Rose Cottage, was opened ready for execution: there were flowers, too, in little mugs and glasses, tributes sent to Maria by the *beaux* of her society. Plates of cakes and decanters of wine were on the sideboard, and the dangling glass lustres, which formed the adornments of the chimney-piece, now supported four flaming wax candles.

None of the company had yet arrived; but various knocks and rings announced that they were coming fast, and soon one after another was welcomed by Maria and her mother, congratulations and shaking of hands following in due course.

Young Mr. Simpson, a dapper, conceited youth, in a white waistcoat and the wristbands of his shirt much displayed, entered with a bouquet, which he presented to the fair daughter of Mrs. Spicer with a compliment which he had evidently been studying to deliver in a Parisian style, as he prided himself on understanding what he called *the little agreements of society*. He then volunteered to sing some lines Mrs. Spicer had confided to him, and which he had set to music himself. They began—

“Muses! let’s be blythe and gay,
’Tis Maria’s natal day!”

and were much applauded, no doubt both on account of the excellence of the verses, the grace of the composition, and the talent of the singer; but the heroine in whose honour they were produced seemed singularly indifferent on the occasion, her glances being continually turned towards the door as if she expected some guest more interesting to her than the animated, spruce Mr. Simpson.

While he was yet singing, Maria had started up two or three times to admit other guests, many of them young medical students who attended a class in a street near, and somewhat vociferous and noisy were they on their entrance, till, perceiving Mrs. Fowler and Miss Fane, to whom they were rather formally presented in turn by Mrs. Spicer, as if by way of warning, and to repress the too great exuberance of their spirits, they subsided in whisperings and gigglings and undertoned jocosity amongst each other.

“Who’s that, Maria?” said one of them, who was a relation of the late Mr. Spicer and consequently at home, as he spoke he looked furtively at Clara; “she’s a monstrous fine gal that! where did you pick her up?—she looks rather in the empress line.”

“Hush! Charles,” said Maria, softly; “its Miss Fane, quite a lady, our new lodger, just come from France. Oh! she can sing worth hearing indeed, but I’m afraid we must’nt expect her to condescend.”

“She’s too grand by half,” replied the student; “Where’s Celia? she’ll be glad to show off to-night, I lay.”

“She’s late,” replied Maria; “she says its vulgar to go early to a party, and she is coming in a coach because it looks vulgar to walk.”

“Why,” laughed Charles, “the affected puss only lives ten doors off.”

“No,” said Maria; but then every one does not know that, you know, and it sounds genteel to drive up and give a loud knock. I dare say, there she is! or else its the Pennymans, they’ll come in a coach too.”

“What!” cried the indiscreet Charles; “only from the Work’us over the way, that’s capital”

“Don’t mention that horrid place, cousin Charles,” exclaimed Maria, quite alarmed. “Mrs. Pennyman calls it the Institution and says they are the directors; the paupers call him Mr. Director Pennyman, because it’s more respectful; he’s very rich they say and they never live there—its only a kind of town house for them—they’ve got a villa at Hornsey with such a conservatory!—and keep a fine carriage, only they don’t like to drive up to the—the—Institution in it, for fear of being thought proud. There such a beautiful piano and harp at Hornsey.”

“Does old Pennyman play on’em himself as he does on the paupers?” asked Charles, with a giggle; but his sarcasm was interrupted by the arrival of the great personages of the evening, Mr. and Mrs. Director Pennyman in person. Maria had not, this time, opened the door, the ‘gal’ having been directed to leave her muffin-

11 10
13 9
toasting and perform that office when their carriage was heard, Mrs. Spicer justly remarking to Mrs. Fowler, that she knew her daughter's place better than to allow that.

"The Pennymans," said she, "are so very genteel, and rolls in riches, that young man with the white waistcoat's her nephew; they say he'll be the heir of all; he admires Maria, and it would be a fine thing for her—but young girls are hard to please. They've such a house at Hornsey with iron gates close to the road and coach house and stabling like lords!"

"Are they retired from business, or what's their profession?" asked Mrs. Fowler, merely in order to say something.

"Oh, he's a director," replied Mrs. Spicer, bridling.

"An India director? really," answered Mrs. Fowler.

"Not exactly," returned the hostess; "a great friend to the poor, gives up all his time to them."

"It does him honour," answered Mrs. Spicer, "and occasions one to feel interest in him, since he is rich he can indulge in his virtuous feelings."

"He does indulge them," replied Mrs. Spicer, "a good deal. Lor! she's got her red velvet on I declare. I suppose she's going to some grand party after mine."

Mr. and Mrs. Pennyman entered as she spoke in all the dignity of velvet on the lady's part and shining buttons and breast pins on the gentleman's. They both looked very patronising and were presented in great form to Mrs. Fowler and Clara to whom they condescended to speak affably, not however noticing the rest of the company except by a nod or two to the knot of young surgeons who kept together in a corner near the piano, where Maria had been prevailed upon to seat herself. By her absent air, however, it seemed as if there was still a guest wanting to complete the party, it was true Celia had not yet appeared, but it could scarcely be her she expected so anxiously. Just as she had begun a song a low double knock was heard, the sound of which caused her to start and her voice to tremble too much to go on. She jumped up and ran to the door regardless of her mother's reproofing looks, and returned ushering in a pale young man who was hailed with "how are you Wybrow?" by the students; another followed, who appeared to be a stranger to all and was presented as a particular friend who had begged to come with him for the half hour he could stay.

"Only half an hour, Wybrow," said Maria, a little reproachfully, as Wybrow seated himself close beside her, without noticing any one else;

“why this is my birthday—have you forgot it? and we have not seen you for a week.”

“Dear Miss Maria,” replied the young man, turning kindly towards her; “I am so absent I really had forgotton it and only looked in by chance to-night, though you had, I recollect, kindly invited me. Pray forgive me, I have had so much to do, for I go very soon now.”

“You really are going then?” said Maria, her gay laugh silenced suddenly; “and they say its such a horrid place. What the use of going among such savages.”

“Perhaps, but little,” replied Wybrow; “but it’s my vocation—you know I am born to be a traveller in strange lands—and as I came back safe once why should I not be lucky again. You cannot tell the pleasure, Maria, we discoverers have when at a turn of some unknown river, we suddenly come upon a region where new stars burst upon our view, where new flowers and birds and trees are to be found, such as one has only dreamt of before, and one fill one’s knapsack with treasures worth a king’s ransom, to bring home and study and describe.”

“But then if you catch the fever—and—die!” faltered Maria, tears starting to her eyes.

“Ah! there’s no fear of that, dear Maria,” whispered Wybrow, as he stooped down towards

the young girl, and pretending to lift up a piece of music, contrived to touch her hand, "and if I do, you know, there are plenty of other men in the world and I shan't be missed."

Maria's look was so tender though half-reproachful, that it well explained to him that she could not agree in his expressed opinion of his insignificance.

"You know," said she in a very low voice, "we at least do not think so."

"I care for few thoughts beside, Maria," whispered he, but at this moment a very long rap at the street door, accompanied by the rattle of wheels told that a great arrival might be expected and the voice of Miss Celia Sawyer was presently heard, giving directions that the carriage should return in an hour to take her on to Willis's rooms. She then tripped into the dusky parlour with the air of a prima donna, very showily dressed in full ball costume, and holding a large bouquet in her hand. She was greeted cordially by the hostess and her daughter.

"La! Celia," said the latter, "what a beautiful dress? where are you going; it can't be for us you have put on your best things.

"Bless me, my dear, to be sure not." answered Celia. "I'm going with Mrs. Pennyman to Willis's, and have got such a lot of partners, I

shall dance all the night, I'm sure. How nice you look dear, its a pity we could'nt take you, but its one of the very select nights and only subscribers can go, and as for a ticket extra, its quite impossible to get one."

"Oh!" replied Maria, with a glance at Wybrow, who was seated in a state of apparent abstraction with his head leaning on the piano. "I don't want to go to-night, I have all my friends here."

"Who's that strange man?" said Celia, hastily as she turned from the stranger friend of Wybrow, who was looking at her rather rudely; "what a bear! and how ungentlemanly to come to a party in such a dress, well I never!"

"He's a friend of Wybrow's," replied Maria, rather confused. "It is odd, but he didn't remember it was a sort of party."

The object of these comments did, it must be confessed, present a somewhat uncouth figure amongst the young men in smart frock coats and dark stocks who had joined the society in Mrs. Spicer's parlour. He was tall, but his figure was so enveloped in a rough white great coat that its symmetry was entirely destroyed; round his neck he wore a thick shawl comforter which almost concealed the lower part of his face and his dark hair hung so long into his eyes that their expres-

sion or colour could not be ascertained; he kept his hands in his pockets and stood balancing his feet on the bar of a chair at the back of the company as if rather ashamed of the figure he cut.

“Oh! its a friend of Mr. Wybrow’s,” said Celia, glancing at the latter, who appeared unconscious of her presence; “I don’t wonder then he’s something strange.”

Wybrow looked up. “Miss Celia,” said he; I did not see you before, I confess my friend Mr. Jones’s costume calls for apology to the ladies, we are just come up from the country and he had’nt time to change his coat.”

“He might have combed his hair, I think,” said Celia disdainfully.

Mrs. Spicer, meantime, had been glancing rather angrily the same way several times, and Wybrow rose, and taking a chair near her, said rather nervously—

“Will you forgive me for bringing my friend Jones,” said he, “he’s an excellent fellow but very eccentric; I thought you would be alone or he should not have come in his travelling dress amongst such smart ladies. How pretty Maria looks to-night; I hope she’s going to sing.”

Maria overhearing this expressed wish, and desiring to distract her mother’s attention from

the obnoxious coat and hair, whose apparition might be inimical to Wybrow, allowed herself to be persuaded, and sang so sweetly as to restore harmony at once to all parties.

The birthday ode was then repeated by a chorus, accompanied by Mr. Simpson, after which a whist party was made up for the Pennymans, whose bland condescension was quite charming to behold. Mrs. Fowler made one of the party, and Clara, not sorry to be occupied, became the partner of Mrs. Pennyman, who exhibited such a quantity of diamond rings in cutting and dealing as positively to eclipse the candles on the green tables.

There was a great deal of talking in the room, and Celia, strangely enough, found herself again close to the disagreeable stranger, who seemed determined to talk to her; although, at first, very disdainful, she by degrees seemed to take an interest in what he said to judge by the blushing and giggling that ensued.

“Well; I shouldn’t have thought,” said she, that you knew one tune from another to look at you, and yet you talk as if you understood music. Yes, Maria sings pretty well, poor thing—she wants polish, but that is only to be got in the world, and she so seldom goes out.”

“You do, I’m sure,” said the stranger, “and

profit by it. Very few girls are so fashionable looking as you are—who's that playing at whist at that table?"

"Oh that's the lodger upstairs," said Celia, tossing her head; "people I know nothing of; they're not in my set, I assure you."

"So I thought," said the stranger.

At this moment the rubber was finished, and Clara rose from the table, with a secret and treacherous thought springing in her mind of escaping, if possible, to her room, for she imagined her evasion would be unnoticed as the hilarity of the party increased. The ill-dressed stranger still stood balancing his feet on a chair and looking down at Celia, who had now entered into a flirtation with one of the students. As Clara passed him, and was just about to place her hand on the handle of the door, Mrs. Spicer perceived her object and called out—

"Oh! Miss Fane, could we only persuade you to indulge us with one song—just one—it would be so kind, and I have been telling Mrs. Pennyman how beautifully you sing. I hope you will oblige us—do pray now."

Clara paused, detected in her meditated treachery, and beheld that not only was escape impossible, but compliance requisite, and she thought it better to submit with the best grace possible.

“ Will you give Mrs. Pennyman that chair, sir,” said Mrs. Spicer, seizing that on which the rough young man was leaning; he started, and the sudden exclamation of “ Good God! impossible!” confirmed Mrs. Spicer’s opinion that he was not quite in a proper state to be amongst her guests.

“ It’s like people’s impudence,” muttered she to Maria, as she dragged the chair away; “ coming without being asked, and standing looking like some bailiff in one’s room. I wonder Wybrow should—”

But Clara had already touched the instrument, which, bad as it was, under her hand sent forth tones which arrested all ears and silenced all tongues, except Miss Celia’s, who whispered to the rough young man—

“ Professional, of course!”

After a prelude, executed with consummate skill and taste, improvised at the moment, Clara accompanied herself in a simple air, such as she thought might give general pleasure to the company, and her success was complete, for it touched all hearts and filled all minds with delight. One exclamation reached her ear amongst the many which greeted her at the end of her song, which struck her the more as being uttered in a tone which scarcely seemed

to belong to the class of persons who composed her auditory,—

‘That voice should breathe for one alone!’ ”

She did not see the speaker, and on turning round she could not attribute the words to any one of the guests who had crowded round her; their faces were all turned her way, and although plenty of admiration was expressed there was none but that of Wybrow, who was talking to Maria, in which an expression of sentiment could be expected.

“That bear in the white coat’s gone,” said Mrs. Spicer, as she arranged the table for supper in Mr. Grimford’s parlour, which he had graciously given up for the occasion, having intimated his intention only at the eleventh hour, so that she hastened to take advantage of the permission at once for fear he should relent; “of course he’s no soul for music or poetry neither—there’s one less for supper. I’ll tell my mind to Wybrow about it before he leaves.”

But when she returned to the next room she found that Wybrow had also disappeared, and that Miss Fane and Mrs. Fowler had at length effected their escape upstairs, where Maria having followed them and been pacified at the desertion, they were permitted to remain, while the gay supper went on without them, more lively from the

pressure of strangers; of evidently superior order, being removed.

Wybrow did not return as Maria had hoped, but she received so many compliments and was so much congratulated, her health and her eighteen summers were drunk with so much heartiness that it seemed surprising she was not consoled for his absence, the more so that she held in her bosom, where she had hastily placed it, a little locket, containing his hair, which she had exchanged for a ring enclosing some of her own, while the song of Clara had withdrawn all eyes from them both. After supper, Mr. Simpson, the nephew of Mrs. Pennyman, who had been extremely assiduous in his attentions to Maria all the evening after the disappearance of Wybrow, was called upon for a comic song, in which he was thought to excel, and requiring but little solicitation, he forthwith perpetrated one of those vulgarities which have no parallel in any country but our own, and are equally unfit for ears polite, whether sung to admiring aristocracy who crowd round the piano-forte of a received favourite at fashionable *dejeunés* and *soirées*, and listen to senseless words set to execrable music, or whether men painted black and using the lowest gestures, squeak and gibber to rattled bones and "scrannel pipes" in gilded drawing-rooms, where all of grace and refinement

that London can pour forth stands on tiptoe to catch the miserable trash that falls from lips whose slang ought never to degrade such ears by its contact.

Mr. Simpson's effort, however, was applauded as rapturously as such performances always are in English society of all grades, for he was looked upon as quite inimitable in his line; his spirits rose with his success, and the currant wine contributed by godpapa Grimford, emboldened him to exhibit other proofs of his talent. He performed several conjuring tricks with cards, told a variety of smart charades, and his puns were so piquant that the whole table was in a roar of laughter.

He proposed forfeits, and was unanimously supported, and the opportunity these *petits jeux* gave him was not neglected, for he took occasion to tell Maria she was, in his eyes, the prettiest girl between Oxford Street and Piccadilly, let the other be who she would.

This remark was heard by Celia, who felt for his opinion the contempt it merited, and who revenged herself by quizzing his little, insignificant figure, and large round head to cousin Charles, who laughed immoderately, and joined thoroughly in ridiculing the conceited prig who had eclipsed his jokes and songs, usually thought

excellent when not exposed to comparison with an acknowledged genius.

After the last guest had departed and the mother and daughter were alone, Mrs. Spicer addressed Maria rather seriously and advised her to give in future less encouragement to young Wybrow, who, she was sure, hadn't a penny, and was never like to have, and to turn her thoughts to the nephew of Mrs. Pennyman whose expectations were really good, and who, it must be confessed, she said, was a nice young man.

“La, ma! how can you say so?” exclaimed Maria; “with such a great head and little spindles of legs!—well I never!—whatever poor Wybrow may be I'd rather have him without a pound or a penny than that horrid Simpson rolling in riches!”

“He'll have all his aunt leaves, at all events,” said Mrs. Spicer, “and it is worth looking after. I'm sure girls are such fools—I need'ut talk, for I married your poor dear father with nothing, and had to work all my life when I might have married over and over again two or three rich young chaps who were dying for me; and I was much handsomer than you, though not so fair; but some men like dark beauties—I know Grimford does—he said so to-night when he was a little elevated. I'm sure one should make up one's

mind to something, for it's poor work letting lodgings, and being at the beck and call of everybody's whimsies. How lucky Frewen did not come home! I trembled every minute to hear his knock; we should never have heard the last of it, and he'd have thrown this party in my teeth every time he paid me his month—an old tyrant! I'm sorry the second-floor is going. That's a nice girl, that Miss Fane, and very affable; and so's Mrs. Fowler, though a little stiff. I wish I could ferret out their history."

"La, ma!" said Maria, "I daresay there's nothing to find out at all. Miss Fane is so good-natured I quite love her; she takes such pains with my singing, and says she will teach me all the time she's here. I am so sorry they won't stay long; but she'll always come back to us, she says, if she only comes for two or three days to Town."

"So as they pay I shall always be glad to see them I'm sure," said the mother; "but one never knows people by their looks. There's that Captain Power, that we made so much of in the first-floor while Frewen was at Cheltenham, didn't he seem quite a gentleman? yet he went away in my debt, and in debt to all the tradespeople round, after his nasty monkey had set the chimney a-fire and cut off the ball-cock of the water-butt."

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Man derives more enjoyment from the exertion of his active powers in the midst of toils and efforts than he could receive from a still and uniform possession of the object which he hopes to gain.”

Blair.

WHILE Mrs. Spicer and Maria were thus talking over the events of their party, young Wybrow and his friend in the rough coat were also conversing together, but the latter had thrown off the habili-ment which had given so much displeasure, and now appeared in his dressing gown, with his throat divested of its wraps, and in his present guise he presented a graceful distinguished figure and a handsome and intellectual face.

They were seated in chambers in the Albany on easy chairs with carved ebony backs and crimson velvet cushions ; a large fire threw its cheerful blaze upon their feet, and a library lamp, carefully shaded, cast its light on a table strewn with books and pamphlets, maps and papers.

“ My dear fellow,” said the gentleman in the dressing-gown, “ I am heartily sorry that you go so soon, much as I cannot help envying you the adventurous life you have chosen. The field is wide and fortune may dwell in the Desert as well as in a walled city; if it hadn’t been for—

‘ Circumstance, that unspiritual God,’

I would have been your companion in this expedition of discovery, which I feel sure will be so full of profit and knowledge. The Sources of the Nile! what a mystery to clear up. Your’s is a glorious mind, Wybrow: you can treat as they deserve the mere creature comforts of the world, enjoy them while they last, and spurn them for a life of adventure and hardship. This was your character at Oxford, and you have proved that

‘ The boy is father to the man,’

while I am, as I was then, a mere careless useless cypher, doing no good in my vocation and dreaming away existence in the pursuit of chimeras.”

“ My dear Loftus,” replied Wybrow, turning, with animation, his bright eyes upon his friend, “ how unjust you are to yourself! and to me too—for if you pursue only worthless objects, what am I to consider myself whom you have so laden with benefits, so overwhelmed with friendship, that

I am a beggar even in thanks. Without you should I have been able to join this expedition? have you not furnished my whole outfit, my instruments and luxuries? and oh! have you not besides made me happy in this generous allowance to my dear mother, which will secure her comfort and independence during my absence. She will now cheerfully bear my leaving her, and cheerfully look forward to my return, knowing that your friendly care and incomparable generosity have provided me with all that could aid and make my labours light. Do not, dear Loftus, talk of being a cypher when you have made a whole family blest."

Loftus sighed as he took his friend's hand and pressed it affectionately. "What I have had the happiness of doing for you," said he, "is but another link in the selfish chain of the nature that binds me. If I were born a miser or a wretch without a heart I should have merit in such an act; but the joy, the rapturous delight, it yields me to see what pleasure so mere a trifle gives you, how much uneasiness it relieves you from, how much trouble and anxiety it spares you; this makes me so ineffably happy, for the time, that I can only reproach you for giving me any credit for it:—

' Why this is not a boon,

'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
Or feed on delicate dishes, or keep you warm,
Or sue to you to do a peculiar benefit
To your own person.'

Let us talk no more of it: only this—your mother is safe in my care; she will remain at my old place in Derbyshire and I shall see her whenever I run down there, which I think of doing soon after you leave. It is a great relief to me to know that she is there to look after the old tapestry and crazy furniture, for which I have a foolish weakness, and, as it suits her taste to do so, we are you see quite agreed. I should be miserable if only servants were there to neglect the strange old rooms and leave them entirely to the ghosts and rats. You will take, of course, every opportunity of sending me news of yourself for her sake, and may depend on my forwarding her letters, even if I am so lazy as to fail in writing myself. Is there any other commission you wish to give me—I will be faithful?"

Wybrow's pale face became suddenly suffused with crimson, probably because he was stooping over a map of Africa and tracing his intended route too eagerly. He did not reply at first to this last interrogatory, which was delivered in a tone which implied that—

"More was meant than meets the ear."

At last he faltered—"Why, Loftus, it will seem childish and weak I know, but—"

"I know what you are going to say," interrupted his friend, "and you do me injustice. I do not look upon this matter in your case as childish or weak, because you do not partake my sentiments, or prejudices, if you will, respecting women. I have seen to-night that you love that little good-natured-looking Maria, and you feel uneasy at leaving her—you will not be sorry that I should serve you in that quarter?"

"You have guessed what I had not courage to tell you," said Wybrow, much relieved, "yet I am aware what I have done is weak, and, by no means prudent. Maria has not a sou any more than myself—is the child of a worldly mother, who will think her wrong in yielding to the dictates of mere affection—she is very young and inexperienced, uneducated and simple—but innocent and pure as Heaven itself. I confess she is very dear to me, and our attachment has lasted already two years. She is content to wait for prosperous times, and if fortune smiles on me we may yet be happy in each other."

"Charming romance!" exclaimed Loftus: "perhaps to be realized for you: but are you sure that happiness awaits you in a union with one whose mind is not sufficiently expanded to

reply to yours, to understand your aspirations, to share your glory fitly, to do honour to you, to exalt, to guide, to help you? Maria seems a pretty amiable child, without mind or capacity, and you are superior to the greatest part of your kind: you have a mind, Wybrow, to move worlds, and one which must not be tied down to commonplace existence."

"Ah, my dear friend," replied the young man, "you overrate me and scarcely do her justice. Maria is all sensibility, her feelings are above her sordid state, though it is true that she is neither superior in mind or manners to those amongst whom her lot is cast. But she is all love and tenderness, gentleness and rectitude of thought; is just what a wife should be, and to me is all in all."

"I wish I could be in love like you, Wybrow," answered his friend; "what a source of joy you open out to me! I have, as you know, for you have reproved me for it, sought in low life, as well as high, in all societies, good and bad, for a being on whom I could bestow the mighty affection within my soul; but I have failed to find such a creature, I have seen woman only artful, artificial, cold, or may be, too warm: I recognise nowhere the ideal you behold in your Maria. Alas!—

'Man delights not me—nor women either!'

I wish I could deceive myself into a belief that

such gentle purity, such tender devotion, such perfect simplicity, exists as you describe and trust in—but all seems to me vanity and vexation of spirit.”

“You judge unfairly, Loftus,” answered Wybrow; “you present yourself in your character of a man of fortune and fashion, rich and distinguished and holding a high rank in society, and you are surprised that you are sought for these advantages. If you were poor and humble like me, with nothing to offer, you would be sure to meet the being you seek for—it is more difficult in your position than in mine to satisfy the heart—I never sought but found at once the other half of myself which you go restlessly seeking for, and perhaps have rejected already more than once.”

“Who was that girl who sang so well to-night,” asked Loftus suddenly, after a pause of musing into which both friends had fallen; “it was strange that going in such a wild way with you I should meet that girl.”

“She is I believe a lodger in the house,” replied Wybrow; “Maria told me something in her favour—she is very good to her, but I scarcely attended to her prattle for I was thinking of herself. I recollect however that she said she and her guardian, another lady there who played at cards, were recommended by Dr. Cowley and came from abroad.”

“She’s very handsome,” said Loftus, abstractedly.

“She’s short, isn’t she—with blue eyes?” asked Wybrow, in an absent tone.

“Good God! no!” cried the friend; “where are *your* eyes, her’s are as black as diamonds and her hair lustrous as moonlight. She looked strangely out of place there.”

“I confess I did not remark her much,” said Wybrow, laughing; “and you will think me the more insensible when I acknowledge that I was whispering to Maria all the time she sang behind the curtain which concealed us from the rest, and I was scarcely conscious of a note she uttered. So selfish are we in our own enjoyments. Who knows—she may prove your *being* after all.”

“Folly!” exclaimed Loftus; “the very height of it! Let us both go to bed, my dear fellow and dream away all this romance and be ready for your early start to-morrow. I wish I was about to accompany you further than the coast—at all events I shall stand on the shore and mark your lessening vessel and “see your barge y-sailing in the sea,” wishing myself with you *en route* for—

‘Africa and golden joys!’”

The evening before Clara’s intended depar-

ture for the country with Mrs. Trumble, she was busying herself in her room in the absence of Mrs. Fowler, who was gone out to make necessary purchases, when Maria entered to bring a letter which had come by post; she held another in her hand and as she gave that destined for Mrs. Fowler to Clara she observed that she trembled and seemed agitated—looking quickly at her, Clara found that the poor girl was pale and her eyes were swimming in tears.

“Dear Miss Spicer,” said she, kindly; “is anything the matter, you look ill—speak, can I not do something for you?”

Maria was just in that state so well described by Crabbe, the interpreter of nature—

“When so full the cup of sorrow grows,
Add but a drop it instantly overflows.”

and the word of consolation offered by Clara succeeded in at once making the cup run o’er. Maria sunk down on a chair with a deep sigh and became so pale that Clara was flying to the top of the stairs for help when she made a faint sign for her to come back and shut the door.

“I shall soon be better,” said she; “but I was quite overcome for the moment to think he was really gone—you don’t know about it, Miss Fane, but I’m engaged to poor Wybrow, and

this is a letter he wrote the last thing to take leave of me, and—and—”

She now gave way to her tears, and as Clara leaned over her and laid her head on her bosom, she contemplated with extreme interest her soft features and innocent face to which her sorrow gave a more than usually infantine expression.

“Be consoled,” said she; “is he gone for long—or will he soon return? where is he going and why are you so unhappy if you are engaged to him?”

“Oh! dear,” said Maria, recovering herself a little; “it is because Ma doesn’t like me to have him, on account of his having no money, and he’s gone with the exploring expedition to the Nile, and perhaps will never—never come back again.”

Her tears here flowed afresh and she threw herself into Clara’s arms in an agony of grief.

“But it is a very grand expedition,” said Clara; “and only clever and enterprising men undertake such. Your friend is no doubt a man of genius and will come back successful, having gained honours and advantages; and then your Mamma will not object, and you will marry and be happy.”

“Do you think so,” said Maria, smiling faintly through her tears; “he said so himself

and perhaps it really will turn out so, for Heaven will watch over and guard him, he is so good. I am so glad I have told you Miss Fane, for now I shall have some one to pity me—but yet you are going away too, and then I can speak to nobody for Celia is jealous because he does not like her, and she does all she can to tease me and makes me worse—so I do'nt mean to tell her we're engaged."

"You can write to me, Maria, you know," said Clara; "and then you can tell me as well as if I was here."

"May I though?" answered the young girl cheerfully; "that will be nice. But I am so ignorant and you are so clever; you will be ashamed of my letters; I wish I *could* write well for then I could say better all I wish to Wybrow."

"Well, write to me and that will put you into the habit of expressing yourself," replied Clara; "you will improve and your friend will be delighted to see how you get on."

"Oh! that will be a pleasure," exclaimed Maria. "I am to send my letters to Mr. Loftus's and he will forward them, and I am to hear from Wybrow as often as possible; he does not think he need be away more than two years and that will soon be gone. It is such a comfort having told you!"

“Who is Mr. Loftus,” asked Clara, willing to turn her thoughts from her sorrows.

“Oh! he’s the gentleman who is his great friend, you know; they were together at Oxford. Wybrow was a sizar and Mr. Loftus a gentleman commoner; but they were always the dearest friends. Wybrow’s father, who is dead long ago, was a clergyman, so he’s quite a gentleman, and Mr. Loftus didn’t mind his being poor, because he himself is very rich indeed and so generous! He has paid all my William’s expenses out and done a great deal for his mother and given him such presents you can’t think, only he does not like it to be talked of, and William only tells me; but you won’t mention it I’m sure for Mr. Loftus might not like it you know.”

“Oh! I will never speak of it,” said Clara, smiling; “and as I shall probably never see Mr. Loftus, or anyone connected with him, there is the less fear of my being imprudent. I am very glad to hear he is so good a friend; what a happy man he must be to have it in his power.”

At this juncture the voice of Mrs. Spicer was heard calling her daughter, who hastily concealed her precious letter, dried her eyes and ran down stairs to answer the demands, while Clara, interested in her simple love story, felt happy in the thought that she had been able to impart some

comfort to her mind, although in reality, she knew nothing of the subject; what we desire much however we so readily believe that it required little to restore hope in the breast of the poor girl who was glad to catch at it anywhere.

CHAPTER IX.

“Aux champs, grace aux Cieux !
Les sottices du temps ne blessent point mes yeux.”

Molière.

MRS. TRUMBLE'S house was situated in one of those charming positions so common in Derbyshire—the Franconian Switzerland of England; not far from Bakewell. A view of Haddon Hall and its numerous towers could be caught from the meadows near, and a line of rich wooded hills formed a background to the luxuriant expanse of dale and field, through which the beautifully winding Derwent, which passed through Chatsworth Park, at the foot of the commencing moors, travelled its silver road.

Vernon House had formerly been a mansion of consequence, and though much altered in the course of time, owing to the variety of its destinations, it still preserved many of its antique

features. The entrance-hall was spacious and commodious, with a pleasant recess window and a large fire-place with an ancient carved marble chimney-piece ; several chambers opened from it, and several doors concealed passages and stair-cases, leading to other parts of the house, which consisted of many rooms, some looking towards the high road, which was not very distant, and some towards a long and very fine garden and a paddock beyond.

There was a large court at the back, round which, on three sides, the house with its two wings extended, and a low parapet wall on the fourth side divided it from the garden, which was reached by a broad flight of steps. This parapet was ornamented at the top by carved stonework, over which climbing plants had been allowed to grow in profusion, and thus rendered picturesque what had originally been formal.

Miss Philippa Giles, the active partner of Mrs. Trumble, was a botanist and delighted in her garden, which was therefore kept in very good order ; her knowledge of plants greatly enhanced her reputation in the neighbourhood, and the attention she bestowed on the study of the heavenly bodies went far to confirm the country gentry round that her acquirements were of an order as superior to that of any of the natives as

the stars she understood were distant from the flowers they shone upon.

“My darter is under Miss Giles,” was an announcement that imparted great dignity to the speaker, and the young lady who had had that advantage was looked upon as a being of no common order.

When Clara arrived at Vernon House her fame had already announced her as a lady from France who could teach music and “the French” in a manner that would, to say the least, astonish the parents of the fortunate pupils destined to be placed under her care. Miss Philippa Giles received her with much courtesy, and welcomed Mrs. Trumble and two new boarders, little girls of very juvenile appearance, who had accompanied the newly arrived visitors from London.

Miss Giles was extremely tall, much above the ordinary height of her sex; like “the virtuous Marcia,” she “towered above it;” she was also strongly built, had sharp black eyes, a rosy countenance, broad flat features, and a great deal of rather rusty black hair, which her ambition was to train into graceful tendrils round her face, although the manner in which it persisted in hanging reminded the beholder more of the shaggy head of a rough poodle. She looked very good-humoured, and was frank and obliging in

her manner, and Clara felt more cheerful and content on her arrival than she could have hoped to be on quitting her beloved friend, Mrs. Fowler, to part with whom had cost her many irrepressible tears, which were indulged in even more freely by that affectionate and excellent woman.

The rapidity of the railroad, which in less than seven hours brought them to Chesterfield, and the jolting of the hired carriage which conveyed them from thence, had succeeded in distracting her attention from her regrets: she was besides young and full of hope, and resolute to fulfil a duty, and she had determined in her mind not to give way to feelings which, indulged, might interfere with the line of conduct she had laid down for herself.

Alas! it is only while youth lasts that the long struggles of a life of pain, disappointment, and bereavement, common to all, can be cheerfully borne, in later years the forces of the strongest mind give way, the spirit sinks, and all is twilight, till the grave closes the scene in night.

But Clara's life, although a sad one in the circumstance of being an orphan protected by strangers, had been in those of its events experienced by herself, only one of tranquil content; she had been brought up from infancy by Mrs. Fowler and her sister, treated like their own child, educated with care, and supplied with advantages

which her remarkable talents had enabled her to turn to the best advantage; these had placed her in a position to gain an independence which in the event of the death of her generous friends, they well knew they could not leave her.

“ Well, my dear Miss Philippa,” said Mrs. Trumble, as she sat after supper in the cosy little parlour by a good fire, while Clara was placed in a comfortable chair near, and the partner looked on with a contented smile, “ well, how have you got on while I’ve been away? Any trouble with any of the gals or the parents?”

“ No,” returned the partner, “ all has flowed smoothly; Emily Parker’s ague is gone off and Jane Sumpter’s cough is better; Farmer Dean says his daughter is to learn the harp this quarter and Farmer Stigman thinks we ought to teach his daughter drawing; Miss Dean came back to-day in the butter cart and brought a harp with her which they sent for from Derby, so we bid fair to be very accomplished this half-year with the help of this young lady, who I hope will find us a pleasant party on the whole.”

“ No doubt of it, Miss Philippa,” said Mrs. Trumble, winking to her partner and giving a peculiar twist to her flexible nose; “ and now, if Miss Fane pleases, as I daresay she is tired, Charlotte shall show her to her room. We shall not

begin business to-morrow for good, so there will be time to explain all in the course of the day. Good night, my dear," she added with a nod, as Clara prepared to obey and followed the young half-boarder indicated to the chamber prepared for her, which adjoined a very large one, filled with little white beds, most of them tenanted by young sleepers, some of whose bright little eyes might be seen peeping forth as the new teacher passed their dormitories.

"Can I do anything for you, mum," asked Charlotte, as she set down the tallow candle she bore on a box, and began to busy herself in arranging Clara's things with an inquisitive air.

"No, thank you," replied Clara; "I am used to wait on myself, and am sure I shall find all comfortable."

"That's lucky," said Charlotte, "for we never do, particularly when old ma'm Trumble comes back. Miss Philippa's easy managed, but we shall be on short commons again now old skinflint's here."

"How many young ladies are there?" asked Clara, rather startled at the unwelcome confidence reposed in her.

"Oh, we've four and twenty gals," was the reply, "and ten day-boarders; they comes from the villages round about, and they brings all their

pockets full of cakes and apples; so they're well enough off."

"Are you not then sufficiently fed?" asked Clara.

"Oh, old ma'am Trumble thinks she gives us enough for our health, she says, but there's two half-boarders, and they gets the worst off. I'm one, and she knocks and beats me about because of her own niece Kitty, that's always stealing and telling lies, and laying it on me; but I'll be even with her."

"Is Miss Kitty here now, then?" said Clara.

"Yes, she's in the bed at the upper end; mind you don't say much you don't want repeated when she's near," returned the discontented young damsel; "she's always listening and carries everything to her aunt. Miss Philippa hates her and so do we all—so, that's one comfort."

"You like Miss Philippa, then?" asked Clara.

"Oh, yes; she's good enough if she's let alone, and as long as she can curl her hair and gets a bow from young Curtis, as he passes by on horseback when we're out walking. She's ten years older than he is, out then she's got money, and so he let's her be in love with him: she could put him in her poeket for his size."

Clara felt no inclination to hear any more of the secrets of the family, and accordingly as soon

as she could, dismissed her talkative acquaintance, whose manners gave her but a poor opinion of the style of the establishment.

“Where,” thought she to herself; “is the rustic simplicity and confiding innocence one hears so much of as existing in the country and abiding in the bosom of youth? I have scarcely been an hour in this house and I hear of proud pretension, malice, bitterness and the desire of revenge, of vanity and calumny and a variety of evil feelings. If my task is to reform these it will be no light one. This is one of the contrasts I suppose I must expect in the course of my life. What a difference between this coarse incommo-
dious room and my pretty little boudoir at Passy where all, though simple, was so elegant; and how unlike the luxury of Rose Cottage! but perhaps happiness is as near me here as I should have found it under that strange roof—with strange people whose very names are a mystery to me. Who could he be, that daring stranger, who said in a few moments, more than the most encouraged lover would dare to do after years of servitude, according to the ancient mode—in these railroad times all events occur somewhat too quickly methinks, like our hopes,

‘as quickly they pass—but they never return.’

Of course I shall never see or hear of any one connected with that baseless fabric of a vision again."

She said this with something like regret, and her thoughts were accompanied with an involuntary sigh which she coughed away.

"At all events," said she, opening her window and looking out upon the garden and court immediately beneath, which was illumined by a bright moonlight; "at all events, nothing can destroy or disturb the glories of nature—from the cabin or the palace. Heaven shines on all alike and cheers and consoles us for the faults and failings of man. I shall be at least free in this little nook to think, to write and to feel, and what is fine furniture and a gilded chamber where liberty is not? I dare say I shall be very happy here."

With this reflection, in spite of a few tears, after looking out for a short time into the fresh clear space and calming her mind with the pious and gentle thoughts that were habitual to her, Clara at length became composed and retired to her first night's rest in Vernon House.

Meanwhile Mrs. Trumble and Miss Philippa Giles conversed below stairs.

"I consider Miss Fane a very elegant looking girl," said Miss Philippa; "quite superior, with such a Parisian air! She will make a good figure

at church, and I should'nt wonder if the look of her only got us some new pupils. Being abroad is such an advantage. If ever I change my state my first object will be to take a trip abroad, it improves the mind so much."

Mrs. Trumble frowned and her nose became slightly convulsed, for any allusion to a change of state on the part of Miss Giles always conjured up in her mind visions of dissolution of partnership which accorded but little with her financial views, for in their present position she was sufficiently well off and could enjoy a variety of good things which thrown on her own resources she would find it difficult to indulge in. She therefore never heard with perfect equanimity of her partner's aspirations after the holy state which had become of late the too frequent theme.

"Indeed," said she; "people should be content as they are if they knew when they were well off. My poor dear Mr. Trumble, who was in the law himself, was an excellent husband if it had'nt a been for his temper, but men all have tempers, and woman is a slave except she's single as I am, happy to be so now since it pleased Providence to remove him. We all have our trials and we should'nt court them. I'm glad you like Miss Fane; I was afraid she was a thought too stylish and fine and I'm sure we

shant get her to be useful in the house, for she seems to be brought up a fine lady to know nothing but learning. However we must put more on the half boarders as we must pay for appearances. That Charlotte shan't go on in her laziness much longer; I'll see to her getting up an hour earlier for the time to come and that she does the ironing of the fine things too—she's old enough now and we get little enough by her."

"She's been a very good girl while you were away," said Miss Giles; "I've nothing to complain of in her, except her curiosity peeping into my notes and watching when anyone bows to me. Mr. Curtis called here the other day to see Jane Sumpter and I caught her listening at the key hole while he spoke a word to me in the parlour. All the world might have heard what we said I'm sure—it was only about his patient, but one does not choose to be watched by a young chit like that." Miss Giles tossed her tresses back from her brow and leant her cheek on her hand as she said this with a sigh.

"I suppose young Curtis will be looking out for a wife of his own age soon," said Mrs. Trumble, spitefully; "it will be the better for him, for I don't like encouraging a doctor who isn't married, it's not so respectable in an establishment

for young ladies. I can't think why old Doctor Beale can't come himself, instead of sending that jackanapes."

"He is far from deserving that appellation," returned Miss Giles; "he is a young man possessed of a refined mind able to appreciate superiority, and a medical practitioner also of great skill!"

"Perhaps he'll fall in love with Miss Fane," said Mrs. Trumble; "they'll be two fine people together."

Miss Philippa started and bit her lip, and unpleasant visions appeared to rise to her mind.

"I hope the young lady you have introduced, madam," said she, severely, "is too correct in her conduct to give rise to such surmises, otherwise your judgment will suffer."

"Oh, I was only joking," said Mrs. Trumble, fearing she had gone too far, "and she may be engaged for what I know. Well, my dear, we'll hope all will go on well, and nobody will think of marrying yet; there's always time for young folks to think of bettering themselves. I've brought down the wreath for your hair you wanted—it's quite a love—and the victorine, and the ribbons, and the bonnet, quite the rage in London. I think we shall cut a figure at church

and at the Well-flowering this season. Is Lady Brixton at the hall?"

"She has just returned," said Miss Giles, "with the two girls, as great flirts as ever. And the Goldspins are all at home, as proud as usual."

After discussing many other minute particulars, relative to their neighbours and their establishment, the partners retired, their conversation having been previously gleaned carefully by Charlotte, who was at her customary post at the keyhole, a position which enabled her to become thoroughly acquainted with all the secrets which she considered it necessary for her to know in order that she might regulate her conduct accordingly. In this accomplishment she might have been a worthy pupil of Mrs. Spicer, between whom and herself, as far as this similarity went, there was a sympathy as strong as that the German poet declares to exist between two trees of the same species, which, divided by two worlds, sigh for each other's society.

CHAPTER X.

I sought out for one to love—in love with being loved!

St. Augustin.

FOR some months Clara continued in Mrs. Trumble's establishment and led a life sufficiently monotonous but not disagreeable. Miss Philippa was affected and silly at times, and so much taken up with her romantic attachment to some lover in her mind that she consented to invest Mr. Curtis, the apothecary, with the attributes she desired. It was not, however, very frequently that they could meet, as their several avocations took up their time on both sides almost entirely. Church, where Miss Giles led her little flock, Mr. Curtis could seldom contrive to visit—

“’Twas such a busy life,”

but now and then in their botanical walks as spring crept on, when the young ladies were

allowed to wander about the fields and lanes in search of specimens, the young doctor's steed would sometimes be met trotting along and his master would linger beneath the shady arches of the trees and utter commonplaces which with Miss Philippa passed muster for the most refined gallantry. On one of these occasions Mr. Curtis drew from his waistcoat pocket a card, which he presented to Miss Giles, apologising for having hitherto neglected to do so.

"I have been very remiss indeed," said he, "to have forgotten to give it you before; it's an artist's, said to be very clever, and I thought if any of your young ladies should like to be drawn he might get a little employment. He hasn't been long here, lodging at Farmer Stokes's, and doesn't seem to have much to do; he's rather a queer-looking genius, but well-spoken enough. He's always drawing the old men and women about, and makes capital likenesses, which he very liberally gives the good people for their trouble. The other day he asked me to recommend him at your school, but I quite forgot it. You look so well yourself, Miss Philippa, that I think you couldn't do better than let him try his hand on you."

"Dear me, Mr. Curtis, I'm sure I should not dream of such a thing!" lisped Miss Philippa;

“I think it’s only fit for people that are engaged, and I’m far from that I’m sure.”

“Well, ma’am,” returned the young apothecary, “there’s no saying how long you may remain so, you know, and it’s always well to be prepared.”

So saying, with a satisfied laugh at his own wit, he put his horse into a canter, and waving his hand gallantly disappeared from her view, as the conscious Ariadne whispered to her heart—

“He certainly must mean something!”

She looked at the card, on which was written “J. Clark, Artist and Portrait Painter, from London, on Moderate Terms,” and so absorbed was she in her thoughts that the grammatical construction of the artist’s phrase passed unnoticed even by her critical ken, accustomed to continued correction of similar errors.

“I have a good mind,” mused she, “to sit to this man, if it would not look particular, if he is not dear, and I can get Mrs. Trumble or Miss Fane to do the same.”

On her return home Miss Philippa was quite absorbed in this new idea, and Mr. Clark’s card was preserved with care to be acted upon as occasion should serve hereafter. Clara was surprised to hear her continual desire expressed that she should sit for her portrait.

“You would make such a good picture,” she said, “and really I should so like to see it. Suppose we send for this artist, Clark, and see what he has done.”

As Miss Philippa was in part mistress at Vernon House she had little trouble in gaining her point, having artfully contrived to interest Mrs. Trumble by suggesting that her niece, an ugly, awkward girl in the school, would look lovely on paper.

At length it was agreed that the artist should try his hand on no other than Miss Giles who affected to sacrifice herself for the good of the community.

Mr. Clark accordingly came, and very rapidly succeeded in taking the portrait, charging so moderately that Mrs. Trumble's heart was disposed to open towards him, particularly when he very liberally offered to paint her niece for nothing, begging to present the picture, when completed, to the worthy aunt.

In the height of his favour Mr. Clarke was asked to tea, and it was on that occasion that Clara first saw the hero of much talk for the last few weeks. Mr. Clark was not, however, a person to interest her much, and she would scarcely have noticed his presence but for the novelty of a male visitor appearing within the sacred precincts of the establishment at all.

Mr. Clark was a tall man, remarkably ill-dressed, and awkward in his appearance; his costume on the evening when she first met him was a black coat which hung loosely round him, a pair of grey trousers, very full and stuffed into Hessian boots, which were adorned with tassels; his shirt collar was large and high and nearly covered his cheeks, which were shaded by bushy red whiskers; he wore blue spectacles, and a black silk scull cap, which he apologised for retaining, excusing himself under the plea of having lately suffered from deafness, a defect which was at times sufficiently apparent, and though doubtless inconvenient to himself enabled those around him frequently to indulge in remarks which they might not desire him to hear.

For instance, when Mrs. Trumble asked Clara, *soto voce*, what she thought of their new *beau*, she answered without fear of shocking him by her candour, as she was already informed of his defect—

“He is the most awkward, extraordinary-looking man, and would be altogether disagreeable but for his voice which appears to me at times to be almost musical.”

She had soon, however, reason to be surprised at the falseness of ear; for, in a general way, Mr. Clark's voice was harsh and husky, and some-

times was singularly hoarse, owing to frequent colds which he mentioned being subject to in consequence of exposure to weather when sketching.

He had rather an absent manner and a short, abrupt way of speaking which was somewhat comic. On the whole he evidently possessed the elements of an eccentric character; but he was singularly good-tempered and obliging, and as he spoke little and appeared inoffensive he became by degrees quite a welcome guest to the two ladies.

He was exemplary in picking up fallen gloves and handkerchiefs, in handing muffins and cups at tea, in placing chairs and other little civilities. He could play a little on the flute, too, although he often put Clara out when he attempted to accompany her, and would, in the midst of a passage which he was really executing well, stop suddenly short and apologise for his deficiency. He was, indeed, accustomed to apologise for everything, in and out of season, and this peculiarity, added to a habit of staring, for which he also apologised as arising from a habit of abstraction, made him sufficiently ridiculous.

One day, after indulging in one of those fits of gazing which went near to put Clara out of countenance, he suddenly exclaimed—

“’ Pon my word, mum—taking a liberty I fear, but artists are but men—when we see a fine head we long for it—beg to be excused for saying so. Preparing picture for Exhibition—new subject—Holy Family—dying for a Madonna!—at a stand still for subjects—good Josephs amongst the peasants—excellent Josephs—and asses good—capital colour—but Madonnas rare—your head just the thing—be the making of my picture. Mrs. Trumble promises for St. Anne, if Miss Giles would condescend to be my Magdalen—beg to be excused for proposing it.”

Miss Giles bridled—“ Bless my heart, Mr. Clark,” said she, “ I’ve always been led to suppose the Magdalen was not a proper character.”

“ Character not quite correct, mum,” replied Clark, “ but hair beautiful.”

Miss Philippa was propitiated, and, after some further discussion, little to Clara’s satisfaction, it was agreed that the sittings should take place.

“ It will make the school talked of,” observed Mrs. Trumble, “ and that’s worth some trouble. You must agree to our hours, Mr. Clarke, for business must be attended to. Shall I want a new cap for St. Anne?”

“ Drapery, mum, drapery will suffice,” said Mr. Clark, much pleased, “ all properly arranged

—understand *tableaux*, mum—beg pardon for naming it.”

“Well then,” said Mrs. Trumble, “I’ll *set* when Miss G. can’t, and Miss G. when I can’t, and I think we shall manage the affair between us.”

“Hope and trust so,” said Mr. Clark, “quite a god-send to me.”

“Poor man! he’s so grateful!” observed Miss Philippa, aside, “one likes to oblige him. We shall make a few excursions in the fields and woods,” she continued, “as the summer comes on, and I hope you will be one of our *beaux*; it will really be quite pleasant to have a person who can make himself so handy.”

This invitation in perspective was accepted readily by the artist, whose eyes sparkled through his spectacles at the prospect, as no doubt he considered that the patronage of the partners could not fail to procure him numerous orders and greatly advance his views.

The sittings took place in due course, and the picture of the candidate for the honours of the Royal Academy proceeded, although slowly: he professed to be a slow worker and to require many sittings, when he painted in oil colours, although rapid with his pencil in his mere sketches. A

small room with one window, at the back of the house, was appropriated to his work ; this was on the ground floor, immediately under that occupied by Clara, and looked towards the garden. Mr. Clark was permitted by Mrs. Trumble to remain there sometimes to paint after his sitters were dismissed and as several of the children's parents wished them to be painted, he passed much time in his little parlour, not, however, making as rapid a progress a might have been expected.

He evidently studied his subject minutely, for Clara became, at last, almost disconcerted at the pertinacity of his regards, and she observed that he would lean back in his chair and gaze fixedly on her through his spectacles without transferring to the canvass the look he was attempting to catch.

One day, when this examination had lasted a longer time than usual, Clara became at last impatient, and rose suddenly from her seat, excusing herself from remaining longer as well as she could.

“ Stay, Miss Fane,” said the artist, rising also and detaining her by standing between her and the door, “ I foresaw that you would get tired of sitting to me, but I have something particular to say to you ; will you oblige me by resuming your seat while I converse upon a subject which, perhaps, may dissipate the *ennui* which you no doubt feel, and which, I confess, I begin to share ?”

There was something peculiar in his voice as he said this which struck Clara as extraordinary; she sat down again, and the artist continued—

“Do you recollect the first time you and I ever met?”

Clara started—“We met here, a few weeks ago; it is not so long since that I should forget,” said she.

“We have met several times,” replied he; “but at Rose Cottage do you remember that I told you you were my fate and I yours from that moment.”

As the artist spoke this his tone was altogether changed, and Clara, to her astonishment, found she was listening to the voice which had uttered such strange words to her on a former occasion amongst the fairy people.

“I am as much a stranger to you now as I was then, but you are not so to me; I have not ceased to watch you since I personated a certain wizard in Paris, and I have taken this method—a strange one you will think it, perhaps—to introduce myself where you are and to become acquainted with your character.”

“You take a method, sir,” said Clara, reddening, “of which I am so far from approving that it inspires me with just displeasure. Why should you try to injure me by assuming a disguise

which is unworthy of you and must compromise me. I seek you not; you deceive yourself in supposing that, after this, I ever shall; and all I have to say to you is, that I shall immediately think it necessary to acquaint those whom you are deceiving that you are not what you seem."

"You are wrong, fair Clara," replied the stranger, "you do not know me; you cannot say that I am not an artist working for my bread. What disgrace is there in receiving my addresses in my present capacity? you, a teacher in a school, I, on the same footing—you, patronised at Rose Cottage, I, the same—what have you to tell? Did you ever hear my name before?—am I not Mr. John Clark, at your service, and your obedient servant into the bargain? Sit down and listen, do not make an *éclat*—do not compromise yourself, and there is no harm done. I have already declared to Mrs. Trumble that I am your admirer—she has therefore nothing to learn; she approves of my suit and gives me her countenance. I cannot see the harm of our carrying on our happily-begun friendship in a quiet way."

"This is both absurd and impossible," said Clara, annoyed at his coolness. "Do not suppose me so inexperienced as to be unable to act for myself and to do what I think fit and proper. I shall go immediately to Mrs. Trumble, and relate

to her the whole affair; she will at once, of course, relieve me from your presence and from the inconvenience of the position into which your strange whim has cast me."

"Would you like me to indulge you in Ercles' vein?" said the stranger, with imperturbable *sang-froid*. "Shall I tell you I adore you, and shall I kneel at your feet to declare the fact? Or shall I very quietly take off my spectacles, put my false whiskers into my pocket, remove my black scull cap, and allow my own hair to appear, and thus give you a glimpse of a face which you will not forget again? My voice has already made impression enough on you—you recollected it at once."

As he spoke he very deliberately suited his actions to his words, and the fine head of the guest at Rose Cottage took the place of that of the eccentric Mr. Clark. The transformation would have been complete but for the ridiculous costume he wore.

"And now, Clara," said he, "I will relieve you from my presence; do not imagine I abandon you, I am in no mood for that, I merely wait my time. I have done nothing to offend you and you have no right to be offended. Let us part friends; but hear me at least for a few moments, as after this time you seem in no humour

to afford me other opportunities of talking to you. I have long sought for a being such as my idea has conceived, and have never yet found her; I imagined from the first, when I saw you by the merest chance, that you were my ideal; I have followed you since in order to discover if I have deceived myself. I cannot yet decide, because I fear to be betrayed, as all men are, by the admiration which beauty excites. I regret that you are beautiful—as fair, it may be, as that form which inspired the soul of Apelles, when, at the fountain of Pireneus, he first beheld the youthful Laïs, pure then as you may be, yet lovely as she was—but I will not compare you to her except in her nonage. Beauty is ever a snare: the Venus of Praxiteles was no divine emanation; it was the marvellous beauty of the accomplished Phryne that served the artist for the model of his immortal statue. Excuse me for naming her,” he said, in a comic tone, and resuming the voice of Mr. Clark.

“Cease, I entreat,” interrupted Clara, “I cannot permit these philosophical reflections to be carried further. Your surmises respecting me are totally indifferent as far as I am myself concerned. Since I do not covet either your admiration or your regard—for you are a perfect stranger to me—I cannot see why I should be

forced to prolong this interview. I beg you to let me pass, and that you will depart immediately, and leave me free for the future. You have no sort of right over me, and I will not submit to the cool impertinence by means of which you seem to think to control me."

"My fair *courroucée*," replied the stranger, "your indignation is as just as becoming, but now you have driven me to detain you farther, in order that I may endeavour to obtain your pardon. I am really sorry for the annoyance you feel, and earnestly entreat to be forgiven. Consider my conduct dispassionately: I see you first in very singular society, I do not know you, I am struck with your appearance, I listen to your voice and recognise genius—this enchants me, I lose sight of you and by the merest chance I see you again, and again, always in singular society, I discover your retreat, I follow and meet you once more in singular society. You are formed to grace any position, yet I have not yet seen you in that which should be your element. Am I so wrong in speculating upon what and who you may be when our first meeting was at Mrs. Frillet's?"

Clara was much struck with this last question, and the more respectful tone, approaching even to tender interest, in which it was put.

"I will so far condescend," said she, "as to

ask you, in my turn, why the society, which appeared to me so refined and so attractive as that at Mrs. Frillet's, should cause you to consider it strange that I should have met you there."

"If you do not already know it I can inform you that it could not appear otherwise, since the character Mrs. Frillet bears in the world is by no means spotless: she lives separate from her husband, receives persons who are seen nowhere else, is indebted almost to chance for her gay establishment, and is by no means a proper person to introduce a young lady into the world."

Clara blushed deeply, and replied—"We did not know all this, we had never seen Mrs. Frillet till the day before I met you at Rose Cottage, she answered my advertisement for a situation as governess, and Mrs. Fowler and I went down with a view of my undertaking the education of her little daughter, Dorine."

"This is comic," said the stranger; "Dorine is a creature then of her fertile imagination; she must have brought you there to have amused him she calls her brother, who was getting tired of her society and the expense of entertaining her caprices."

"I have been sadly deceived," said Clara, mortified and distressed at every word he uttered, "and my dear Mrs. Fowler no less so—she would

not have exposed me to this for worlds. But, perhaps, it is you who are deceiving me and slandering that lady; what object could she have in acting in this manner to a stranger? I cannot believe it. But, be it as it may, sir, it is time to put an end to this disagreeable explanation, of which I desire no more. Mrs. Frillet took no farther notice of me after I parted with her at Rose Cottage and my object has since been gained. I am now placed, and I desire no interference on the part of any one, being capable of directing my actions myself."

"You have already proved it," said the stranger, sarcastically, "with the great knowledge of the world shown at your *débüt*, you will, of course, never fall into snares; should you, however, be placed in any awkward predicament, and I can help you, you may depend on me. I see, by your frowning that you do not intend to employ me, but the day may come when you will think better of me than you do now."

"I have little reason to think well of you at present," said Clara, "for all you have done has tended to annoy me. Our acquaintance ceases from this time."

So saying, she made an effort to pass him, which he no longer prevented, but, bowing, allowed her to go, and she left the room with a

lofty step, without glancing to the right or the left.

The false Mr. Clark paused a minute, seemed to reflect, then having apparently decided on a course of conduct, he replaced his disguises and reseated himself at the easel, awaiting the arrival of Mrs. Trumble. That lady soon after arrived, and, on her entry, he appeared to her in a state of affliction, having covered his face with his handkerchief as if to conceal his tears.

CHAPTER XI.

En amour il y en a toujours *un* qui aime *l'autre* :—il était décidé a n'être plus jamais que *l'autre*.

Al. Karr.

“BLESS me, sir,” cried Mrs. Trumble, when she entered the room, “what has happened! what can be the matter?”

“Oh, ma'am,” replied he, “such a scene—quite overcome. Experienced the most unkind treatment from the lady—ventured to declare my passion—beg pardon for naming it—rejects me altogether—insists on my quitting the neighbourhood—heart-broken to do so, but will obey her—hard work for the nerves, ma'am.”

“You can't go,” replied Mrs. Trumble, “till you have finished them picters, you know, let her be ever so cross. I can't say I ever thought Miss Fane would have you; she isn't like Miss Philippa, who would be ready to jump at an offer

any day it was made. However, Miss Fane's only my teacher, and it's no affair of mine; she settles her own affairs, as I hope you will yours, and be as good as your word about them likenesses. I shouldn't like to offend the parents of them children."

"Certainly, ma'am," resumed Mr. Clark, "but hard upon me to be refused so downright. Lady thinks because I'm only an artist that I have no money—may carry her geese to a worse market—may have saved something after all these years of work—could keep a wife as well as any of her fine lovers, if she has any."

"Really, Mr. Clark," said Mrs. Trumble kindly, propitiated by the allusion to his means, "I am sorry for you, but as I have no wish to lose a teacher who suits me pretty well, I cannot be sorry you haven't carried her off. Don't be down-hearted—faint heart, you know—we shall see by and bye whether she wo'nt be a little more tractable."

"Much obliged, ma'am," said Mr. Clark, "much obliged—if I can serve you in the way of scholars shall be happy—school exactly suit my cousin—rich lawyer's wife—Mrs. Trueman—heard her name no doubt—drives about in her own carriage—has three little girls—hope to be excused for mentioning it."

Mrs. Trumble was much pleased with this politic promise of probable patronage to her establishment and as she never willingly lost sight of her own interest she looked upon the artist with the more favour.

Clara's position meantime was by no means an agreeable one, obliged to conceal the discovery she had made for fear of creating an awkward scene which she had no means of explaining away, uneasy at the knowledge of Mrs. Frillet's character and the equivocal situation in which her visit to her house had placed her, she hesitated what to do and saw difficulties increasing around her in the artful management of Mr. Clark, who had so contrived as to gain both Mrs. Trumble's and Miss Giles's good will, both of whom spoke to her in his favour and he evidently showed that he had no intention of leaving the neighbourhood. She had it however in her power to refuse any longer to sit for the completion of the picture, and also to decline making one in the parlour on evenings Mr. Clark was a guest and consequently she saw her persecutor no more.

She wrote immediately to her only friend Mrs. Fowler, relating the event which had so much perplexed her and suggested to her the propriety of seeking for another situation where she could be free from the annoyance which now beset her.

“I know not,” said she, in her letter, “whether this person is really an artist as he pretends; he is at all events a master in his art and shows singular talent, yet I cannot help thinking his real rank in society is more exalted; he is one of the best actors imaginable and I fancy could assume any form that suited his purpose. I am able for the present to avoid him, but how long this will last I cannot say, he is a frequent guest in the house and from a few words that Miss Philippa let fall I really suspect he is pretending to offer her his attentions; this is, of course a further deception; but she is so vain and silly that she is capable of encouraging him, if she finds that the young apothecary makes no demonstration in her favour. I could almost laugh at the absurdity of my position, yet it is nevertheless very vexatious and I must escape from it as I may. Midsummer will not be long in arriving and then I shall return to town. Mrs. Spicer’s will be a safe home for me for a time and I must set about either getting daily pupils or finding another situation.

“Imagine how awkwardly I am placed by the extraordinary conduct of this man; almost every evening he serenades me with his flute, stationed at the end of the garden, for the meadows of the farmer at whose house he lives join our paddock

and he can easily jump the fence and approach so near.

“ Miss Giles came into my room the other night on tiptoe, to impart her suspicions to me that that poor dear Clark was playing to attract her attentions—she begged me not to notice the occurrence to Mrs. Trumble—looked very mysterious, sighed and talked sentimentally. He plays as well as he draws, which is inimitably—altogether he must be a most extraordinary character. I regret beyond anything I can express that we were betrayed into that pleasant visit which has turned out so dangerous, it seems to me that most agreeable things have such an ending; true it is that my sojourn here has few attractions, yet it threatens a finale equally annoying. I do not like the life I have hitherto led here; these ladies are the very personifications of common place in their several styles. Mrs. Trumble illiterate and vulgar minded and Miss Giles silly and soulless. I am utterly without the advantage I have so long enjoyed with you that it has become second nature to me—the privilege of expressing all my thoughts and receiving in return precious comments and enlightened remarks, assisting me in all my pursuits and studies—encouraging me and lightening all difficulties. Alas! all is mute and silent round me now, no one understands me or

seeks to do so—I grow like those I associate with and am ready to exclaim with the despairing poet in his exile—

‘Fainting genius, fancy, wit decline,
And all is lost that once I fancied mine!’

I fear I am unsuited to the monotonous life to which I am for the present doomed. I had begun to think danger and difficulty in the world would be better than such stupid security in this obscure corner of it—and just as I had come to this conclusion I am overtaken by the ill-omened adventure which has broken the monotony of which I complained. Perhaps I frighten myself without cause, perhaps this strange man will get tired of the amusement he sought and go away as he came, if so I shall try to reconcile myself to remaining here; the object I desired is gained as far as the routine of tuition being mastered and I am as learned in petty nothings as could be required. You will say that my proneness to romance is being rewarded and that I am becoming a heroine. I will let you know if the scene shifts, and my perplexities end.”

Very few posts after that which had carried this letter to Llangollen and caused considerable uneasiness there, brought one to Clara from Paris which unexpectedly relieved her mind; she lost no time in forwarding it to her anxious friends

and looked forward with impatience to the time when she could avail herself of the relief it held out.

The letter was from her dear friend of Paris, Eugenie. It was thus conceived—

“Best and most amiable of friends. Alas! we have indeed regretted you since our ill fortune carried you away from our roof. My mother and I could not get accustomed to enter the desolate room once occupied by you where for so many months you studied so indefatigably and where I so often interrupted you with my idleness. Well, this melancholy could not last and in order to give a more lively turn to affairs, Gustave must come with his proposals, which I think he made me wait a long while for, *entre nous*, and as there is nothing so good for the spirits as a wedding I thought it my duty not to delay my consent, having as you know, long made up my mind on the subject. In brief we were married, he has the sweetest little shop, which his father gives up to him, in the Rue de la Paix, the upper apartments, which are let to great families, are magnificent; but we have a charming suite for ourselves with a room always prepared for you. Gustave has plenty of busines and I am more useful than he will allow, though he is obliged to confess that I answer customers admirably and can do a thousand

things in the jewellery line almost as well as he can. We took a trip to Fontainebleau and have been enjoying the lovely forest during the last fine warm weather. Was there ever such a Spring! I really think Nature sent it express for our marriage. But the chief thing I have to tell you is a circumstance which may be the means of bringing you back to Paris, at least long enough to give us a glimpse of you *en passant*, if no more.

“One of my husband’s *pratiques* is a rich Englishman, a widower with two daughters. His wife died some years ago in Italy, and he has lately parted with a French governess who lived with them from that time. It seems he wishes to engage an English governess now, in order that his children may have the benefit of their own language and the manners of their own country. You are exactly the person who would be a treasure to these girls, and my husband has made him acquainted with your name. I enclose his address in London and beg you to write and see about it, since, as you tell me and I can well conceive, your present position is not inviting enough to make you desire to bury yourself in a country school when you might find a wider field for your accomplishments.

“Adieu, my dearest and only friend. Gustave begs to offer his homage.

“Yours EUGENIE LECOQ.

“I have changed my name but am still *ton petite chérie* as before. How proud I shall be to show you our *ménage*! The Wizard was right, you see, in my case—has he been so in yours?—confess all to me.”

The advancing year brought with it summer weather and the country round Bakewell was in all its beauty when a party was arranged, at which the whole school was to assist to witness a Well-flowering, one of the prettiest vestiges of an ancient, probably pagan, worship, which England has preserved. Every spring and well throughout the country is on a certain day adorned with flowers arranged in a sort of mosaic work on frames which are placed over the precious waters forming temples and shrines before which crowds of gay pilgrims assemble and offer their tribute of admiration to the beautiful Flora and the beneficent nymphs of the waters.

The country people, who are prone to destroy poetical associations, call these springs *taps*; they hasten from one to the other, for every well in a village is decorated in the same way, comparing

the different taps and pronouncing on their merits. There is always a procession of some club of good fellows who parade the little hamlet with drums beating and colours flying and each of the members is decorated with bright ribbons and bows and scarfs. They finish their peregrinations, after a visit to the parish church, which is always gaily attended on that day, by a jovial dinner and generally there is more than one dance in the place.

Nothing can be gayer or more exhilarating than the aspect of the neat smart young girls and youths who come in their best dresses from distant towns and villages for many miles; vehicles of every kind are seen hurrying along the roads crowded with lively travellers all ready to enjoy and be amused. Though an English merry making is never so brilliant so noisy or so amusing as the same ceremony in France or in Italy, yet there is no want of hilarity and buoyant spirit to carry off a Well-flowering with éclét.

Indeed, in a fine day of sunshine, when the trees are in their full beauty and summer has yielded her richest flowers to make garlands, it is difficult to imagine anything prettier or more animated. Most of the great families of the county, make a point of driving up to the wells, and their brilliant carriages filled with finely dressed company, the

spirited horses of the young squires, the gigs of the gentry, the carts and waggons of the peasants, make a *mélange* sufficiently piquant and entertaining.

Clara's spirits rose with the gay scene she witnessed, and she felt, almost for the first time since she had been in the country, that she could really enjoy its beauties. She was standing before one of the most magnificent of the wells and reading the inscriptions in flowery letters on a leafy ground, which set forth the names of the builders of the wells, their titles, and the dates of their benefactions. The arms, shields and mottoes of the lords of the soil were thus emblazoned with singular art and the effect was charming in the extreme.

Several of the children had grouped themselves about her, others had stayed away with or without their other protectors. Mrs. Trumble was supported by the arm of Mr. Clark, and the simpering Philippa was engaged in a flirting conversation with the young apothecary who walked his horse along the road holding him by the bridle and leant down towards her as she tripped along the path way, lingering as much as possible behind the rest.

Mrs. Trumble presently recognised some friends and having joined them, Mr. Clark relinquished his post and Clara found him shortly at her side.

“Am I so displeasing to you,” said he, in a low voice, “that you will not permit me to enjoy your society for a few moments? Be not uneasy, I seek you this time in order merely to announce to you that you will be in future free from the restraint of my presence. I am going to leave Derbyshire almost immediately. You have been most severely prudent and have kept our secret admirably, for which I am bound to thank you.”

“You owe me no thanks,” said Clara; “the considerations were merely personal which caused me to allow your deception to pass undiscovered. I beg you will not consider that you owe me obligation; assuredly I do not look upon myself as your debtor. I was indulgent enough to imagine that you would have thought it more courteous to remove long since.”

“It is kind of you, at least,” said the stranger, “to entertain anything like a good opinion of me. Suppose I were to change my conduct altogether, and, instead of the bold freedom I have hitherto dared to adopt, I were to become a meek, patient, much-enduring admirer, submissive to your frowns, and content with the hope of receiving after some seven years’ chivalrous apprenticeship to patience, a single smile as my reward. You are smiling now, which is a good sign.”

“I smile,” replied she, “at the absurdity of

my position, not as favouring a preference which has more the air of a persecution. I am no heiress formed to be a mark for mercenary attacks —no popular actress destined to be the object of persevering pursuit: I am an insignificant personage quite unfit to be the heroine of a romantic adventure, and, moreover, a person to whom such distinctions are utterly displeasing.”

She was leaving the place as she spoke, but the crowd had closed round them and to struggle out of it was difficult; she, however, attempted it, but as no one was receding and a great many advancing she found herself unable to make way against the torrent. At this moment there was a cry at a little distance which increased to shrieks, and the people came running along the road confusedly, calling for help and uttering exclamations of terror.

The young apothecary's horse had become suddenly unmanageable, frightened at the drums and horns, had started away from his master, and, with a broken bridle, was galloping into the midst of the crowd overturning all before him. Several persons were knocked down, and others, flying before the terrified animal, fell on their companions. Clara was borne away by the press and thrown violently against the scaffolding of the well; her head came in contact with a wooden

support and she was dashed to the ground stunned and lifeless.

She was not conscious of what had happened till, on reviving, she was astonished to find herself in a low carriage, which was driving rapidly. She looked round her in a bewildered manner, unable to account for her position, and observed that she was supported by the arms of an elderly lady in black, who uttered an exclamation of satisfaction on seeing her come to herself.

“We shall soon be home now,” said she, “and then I hope, with care, you will recover in a short time.”

“What has happened?” said Clara; “I am conscious only of a crowd—a rush and screaming. where is Mrs. Trumble? and where are all the young ladies?”

“I will tell you all by-and-by,” replied the lady, “meantime, do not agitate yourself, you are quite safe.”

While this was said the little carriage was mounting a hill, having entered the gates of a park which seemed very extensive. Clara gazed round her, but found her head so giddy that she was obliged to lean back again. She felt that she she must have sustained considerable injury by the pain she experienced in all her limbs. The last image in her mind was Mr. Clark, and she

had a vague notion of his having caused her accident.

“Whose house is it to whom you are kindly taking me, madam,” asked she; “I perceive that we are not in the road to Mrs. Trumble’s.”

“The house you see at the top of the hill, amongst the trees, is Loftus Hall,” replied her companion; “it is there I am taking you. Mr. Loftus happened to be in the crowd at the Well-flowering and saw your accident; he lifted you up and brought you himself to the carriage in which I had come to see the sight; he desired me to take you directly to his house, as the confusion in the village was so great that he could get no one to attend to you. Pray do not be uneasy; your friends will have been told that you are taken care of, and no doubt you will soon get well.”

CHAPTER XII.

Think on thy Proteus : when thou haply seest
Some rare noteworthy object in thy travel
Wish me partaker in thy happiness.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

LOFTUS HALL was, by this time, immediately in view : it was an antique building, full of windows, and ornamented with numerous towers with carved parapets and chimneys. They entered a wide court-yard through a fine arch, and drove up to the principal entrance where an old servant, out of livery, stood to receive them, and conducted them into a large hall of great height, round which ran a gallery the walls of which were covered with faded tapestry.

Clara was unable to walk without assistance, and was almost carried by the servant into an apartment which opened from the hall.

She had not been long established on a sofa when the arrival of a surgeon was announced who

proceeded immediately to make enquiries respecting the injuries she had received. He addressed the lady in black, telling her that he had obeyed Mr. Loftus's pressing summons and had lost no time in hastening to the hall. He desired that his patient should be put to bed immediately and kept very quiet, but apprehended no serious consequences from the accident.

"I understand," said he, "that several persons were more or less hurt in the confusion, but none really injured. Young Curtis had better secure his horse another time before he carries on his flirtation by the road side. This is'nt the way to do business, to provide patients for other doctors."

He explained that at the time that Curtis's horse burst away and created all the terror which ensued; he was returning from visiting a patient and was met by Mr. Loftus who directed him to ride to the hall without loss of time.

"I had no idea he was in the country," said the surgeon; "and was much surprised to see him. I did not indeed know him at first in his spectacles."

"He only arrived two days ago," replied the lady in black; "and has not been at home since. When he came up to me with the lady in his arms I did not recognise him either in his glasses; he tells me he has had an affection of his eyes

and finds it necessary to wear them. I'm sure its a pity such fine eyes should be hurt."

"Do you know the young lady?" asked the doctor. "I have seen her before walking with Mrs. Trumble's children. I suppose she's a parlour boarder."

"I know nothing but that she is hurt, and is brought here to be attended," replied the lady rather shortly, and the doctor took his leave.

For several days Clara was unable to quit her room; her ankle had received a sprain, which gave her considerable pain, but with the assiduous care she received from the stranger lady she soon began to improve in health and her spirits rose accordingly.

The lady in black visited her one morning and after receiving her reiterated thanks for the kindness she had shown her, Clara ventured to ask if she had heard from Mrs. Trumble.

"She is quite aware of your being here," replied the lady, and has been told that when you are recovered you will return."

"I am extremely indebted also," said Clara, "to Mr. Loftus for his humanity and hospitality, and am at a loss how to let him know my gratitude—perfect stranger as I am."

"Oh," said the lady; "he does not like to be thanked though he is always doing good to every-

one he meets, great and small; he would have done as much for a beggar on the high road: indeed this old house may be looked upon almost as a hospital for wayfarers, so many are sent here and come to be relieved; he never stays here more than a few days at a time, for, as is but natural to a young man of fashion, he prefers a gayer place, and is generally in London or Paris."

"He is a most benevolent man," exclaimed Clara; "it is rare that one young and fashionable thinks of these things."

"But Mr. Loftus is not like anyone else, I fancy," said the lady; "he came into his large fortune when quite a boy, his tutor was a good man but quite unfit to guide him in life, being a bookworm, very absent and absorbed in learning. Mr. Loftus went to Italy, and there, I am told, he made himself an artist, attending the studios at Rome like any of them, then he ran wild about music and studied that, so that he is a proficient in all the arts. When he went to Oxford he gave himself up to study as if his life depended on it, and fortunate it was for me that he took a fancy to my son there. If I could tell you all he has done for him and for me I should never end; he is our saviour and benefactor and we have both reason, as we do, to adore him. I really love him as well as I do my William, only

I have no right to controul him which is a pity, as he has neither father nor mother of his own to give him good advice, and I am afraid he will get into careless habits and not marry, which will be a sad thing, for he would be the best of husbands. He does odd things sometimes, and I cannot always make him out, but I never interfere with any orders he gives. I have only to see them executed here."

At this moment a tap at the door told the lady she was wanted and a female voice was heard announcing the arrival of letters and asking if they should be brought to her there.

"Certainly," she replied; "this lady will allow me to read them while I keep her company."

Clara entreated that she would do so and presently when a large packet was brought to her, she beheld such pleasure in her companion's eyes that she could not help rejoicing to see how gratified she was as she tore open the envelope read a few words in it and kissed the enclosure with rapture.

"It is from my dear son," she exclaimed; "he writes from Egypt, where he is gone with the Expedition to discover the sources of the Nile."

"Really!" said Clara. "I have some interest in that Expedition, a friend of mine, at least, has.

Perhaps your communication may afford some tidings of a young adventurer in that cause—his name is Wybrow.”

“Wybrow!” said the lady, with an exclamation of surprise; what do you know my son then? why the letter is from himself.”

“You are then the mother of William Wybrow who is engaged to my little friend Maria?” said Clara.

“Maria Spicer do you mean? ah! that is the the only silly thing he ever did,” replied Mrs. Wybrow; “he did not tell me of it till the last thing. Pray what is she like?—I am uneasy about it and wish he had not entered into such an engagement. With his expectations he might surely do better,” she added, with the usual pride of a mother, always anticipating for her son a brilliant fortune in marriage, against all likelihood or probability; an amiable weakness inseparable from a mother’s character and destined continually to bring its own chastisement, sometimes far more severe than the venial offence deserves.

There was now a wide field of interest opened between Clara and Mrs. Wybrow; she did her best to place the character of Maria in the most pleasing light and succeeded in creating the interest for which she strove, but the sad fact of her poverty and the unexalted condition of her family

by no means rendered the reflection of her son's engagement comfortable to the maternal mind.

Clara entreated to be allowed to hear the young man's communication respecting his exploring expedition, and the mother was only too much delighted to gain an auditor, who felt an interest little inferior to her own.

"This is the second letter," said the mother; "he tells me his health is quite good, his spirits seem excellent and his enthusiasm knows no bounds. Hear what he says about the popular notions of the great river's source."

"We are not much guided in the directions left us by the ancients or the traditions among the people. It seems that this glorious river was believed formerly to take its rise in the Mountains of the Moon, but as it seems now pretty well ascertained that no such mountains exist we must not direct our researches that way to find the twelve sources. It is said by some to rise from an enormous lake, which, having quitted, it dives under ground, and flows through mines of gold, after which it reaches a line of caverns filled with rubies, emeralds, and coral, and emerges into the Indian Sea, where it forms a rapid current. But a great king once climbed the Lunar Mountains and, concealed amidst their heights, beheld a river of black pitch, which flowed on silently and with an almost im-

perceptible course; neither sun or moon enliven this region, neither breeze nor motion exist, all appears dead and hopeless, and a grey shadow hangs over the whole scene. It is said that no traveller returns who once reaches the summit of certain of the peaks, for he is seized with phrenzy, and, unable to resist the attraction which leads him on, goes madly forward till he plunges into the abyss beneath his steps.

“As this marvellously dangerous spot is found only in the brain of the romancer, I beg you will not be alarmed at our supposed vicinity to it when we really find the long-sought source—a feat I am certain we shall perform—I shall be sure to return and tell you all about our perils and adventures, and we shall laugh at the dangers you at home frighten your imaginations with. I assure you ours is a party of pleasure, with no drawbacks, and one continued succession of exciting interests. The climate is agreeable, by no means too hot, and sometimes at night positively cold. I have heard of no one having fever, and, for myself, I am not in the least afraid of it, not being at all subject to attacks of the kind, except fevers of delight at the magnificent scenes we pass through.

“I wish I could offer you at this moment a draught of the blue water of the Nile, so famous

in all ages ; it is the champagne of waters, pure and sweet as a river of Paradise, so say the poets. A Persian king, who had a favourite daughter, would allow her to have no other beverage, for it confers all sorts of virtues on the drinker. Judge then, how much I shall improve in mind and body during my voyage ! Mahomet himself, if he had been so fortunate as to taste it, would, it is believed, have entreated to be permitted to enjoy his immortality on earth, but, as he never did, he is content with the stream that flows from the throne of Allah, served to him in golden goblets by the maids who inhabit hollowed pearls, and are always ready to attend him.

“ It is marvellous to reflect, that since the time of Sesostris to that of Mohamet Ali the source of this mighty river has been hidden in mystery, and as we glide onward—still higher and higher—it is a sublime thought that we are nearing the unknown region where the immortal secret is preserved.

“ The ancients asserted that it connected the Indus with the Niger, and Alexander, that greatest wonder of humanity, imagined that he had reached the source of the Nile when he had followed the Indus to its birth, as Columbus did when he found a new world. Though Bruce failed why should not we succeed ? I am confi-

dent that the great adventure is reserved for our days.

“ The Arabs say that this sacred river flows direct from Paradise, and recognise the leaves of a certain tree of the eternal garden, which are occasionally seen floating on its surface. We have had some excellent fish whose flavour we highly commended, and are told that it obtains its exquisite quality because its food is composed of these identical leaves.

“ We passed yesterday the Mountain of Birds, where, on every projection of rock, in every niche and corner, dwell countless winged creatures, which, when dispersed by a shot, darken the air with their outspread wings, as they whirl away into space, catching the light upon their plumage.

“ Our sailors keep up a perpetual song, without which they could make no way, and strange it is to lie listlessly in the boat, gliding along the broad, full, calm waters, on which at morning and evening often lies a heavy mist, and hear the echoes of their songs repeated from the shore.

“ We were pursuing our quiet course one morning when we heard a voice from the land hailing us, and perceived a boy, who, with outstretched arms, arrested us to entreat that we

would give his newly-born sister a name; he had been waiting on the margin of the holy river, till the expected revelation was made him, which he considered was sent from Paradise. I called out your name of Maria, my dear mother: I have a double reason, you know, for its being dear to me now."

Mrs. Wybrow paused a moment, only half gratified by this observation of her son's; the slightest pang of a jealousy she could not quite suppress passing through the heart which beat for her son alone.

"Poor Maria," said Clara, "when you see her you will be content that he should associate her with the image which is dearest to him."

The mother read on—

"To the mast of our boat the sailors have fastened a hawk—this is to preserve us from peril, and is, singularly enough, a remnant of Pagan worship, for Horus, the Sun-God, was figured as a hawk as the hieroglyphics exhibit him everywhere, together with the sacred eye and the serpent.

"I have seen several of the amazing tombs whose carved inscriptions have so long excited the curiosity and ingenuity of the learned. The mind is lost in contemplating their multitude and in endeavouring to trace their meaning. The

cities of the living and the dead in Egypt were usually separated by the sacred flood of the Nile, and those who had ceased to exist in one were ferried over to the other; according to their rank occupying a dwelling as magnificent in the first city as in the last.

“To-day I beheld my first crocodile! amazing monster! stretched upon a sunny island, beneath a palm tree, basking and enjoying his frightful existence, and terrifying the traveller with his deformed aspect. The sensations the sight of him inspired were altogether novel and scarcely disagreeable, so much charm is there in the wonderful and new.”

“Ah!” said Mrs. Wybrow, interrupting the narrative, “thus he was always from a boy—delighting in adventures and daring danger. I shudder to think he was so near so hideous an animal.”

“But what a pleasure to have beheld it in its own region, on its own throne!” exclaimed Clara, “and it is a relief too that he does not tell of having shot the poor creature—a piece of cruelty which travellers generally remorselessly indulge in.”

“No,” said Mrs. Wybrow resuming, “they seem to have passed without making him their enemy.”

“I have seen the great temple of Denderah ; I have beheld its famous zodiac, its wondrous porticos, its columns the capitals of which formed of female heads with the ears of horses—strange that such grotesque combinations should form a pleasing whole, yet such is the fact, and imagine the Goddess Aphodite worshipped under the form of a cat and celebrated in hieroglyphics on the walls as ‘The Great Puss.’ The comic and the sublime in Egypt are certainly near of kin.

“I will tell you my impressions of the temple in my next. I am delighted to find that the transmission of letters from every town along the Nile to Grand Cairo is perfectly easy and sure. The posts run from distance to distance, transfer their charge to others who run on, and so the way is soon passed, and my letter will thus be very shortly on its journey to your hand as I trust another from you is now following my route.”

Several more days had passed away, and Clara began now to feel anxious to return to Mrs. Trumble’s, as she was well enough to resume her duties, although she expected it would be more irksome after the leisure she had enjoyed at Loftus Hall, in spite of the pain that accompanied it. She had found books that amused her, music

and pictures, and was pleased beside with the place itself, which was singularly picturesque in its antiquity.

“To-morrow, if you please,” said Mrs. Wybrow, “I will take you back to your own residence, but since your ankle allows you to walk, I must no longer delay having the pleasure of showing you all the curiosities of this mansion, and I assure you it is rich in them. We have even a good ghost legend to boast of, which is rare now to be found in England since railroads have scoured the country so completely of its old stories.”

Loftus Hall was indeed a curious specimen of those sort of mansions which perhaps exist in greater number in England than in other countries—relics of a time gone by and mute evidences of the manners of a race long past. Panelled chambers with carved compartments, filled with coats of arms, cornices of rich foliage, ceilings with numerous bosses, depending like grotto work, tapestries and gilt leather, long corridors, unexpected staircases, concealed closets, passages hidden behind passages, huge halls and tiny oratories, oriel windows and lantern galleries.

One long room was filled with family portraits, amongst which were many historical personages : most of these were curious rather than well-

painted, but there was character and a certain beauty in many. Clara paused before a group of portraits which appeared, from their costume, to belong to the same period.

“To these,” said Mrs. Wybrow, “attach, it is said, the chief romance of this house. You observe the lady with the long hair, holding a ring in her hand and wearing a chain round her neck, she was an heiress of the Loftus family, who was loved by one of the Fairfaxes, whose estates are still joining to these woods. There was a political feud between the fathers, it was at the time of Cromwell when the land was divided against itself. She eloped with Sir Arthur Fairfax and it is said was afterwards poisoned by order of her mother, whose portrait is beside her, that stern looking lady with the long row of pearls at her girdle.

“The son of the young heiress grew up and his son did precisely the same thing as his grandfather for he ran away with this pretty interesting looking girl who is drawn playing with her dog and holding a lily in her hand. She also died very suddenly and left one son. It is a singular thing that ever since that time, and it is now two centuries ago, both in the Fairfax and Loftus family the deaths are always sudden or early, one is often childless while the heir of the other is an orphan.

Now, in the present families, Sir Anselm Fairfax is childless, his young wife having died after being married scarcely two years and Mr. Loftus is an orphan, his father and mother having both died in his infancy.

“There is an odd tradition which sets forth that the spell shall never be removed till a very strange event happens—let me see—I forget the words but we shall find them engraved on one of the panels in what is called the state room. It is covered with a piece of tapestry which represents the sea in a storm with an odd looking boat on it: the talent of our ancestors for designing was not very remarkable.”

When they reached the state room Mrs. Wybrow sought for and found the panel which Clara examined with interest; the tapestry was much worn—it represented the green waves of the sea and between the billows a pointed boat very strangely shaped; a palm tree grew on a rock at one extremity of the picture and a willow on the other, but there were no signs of land besides the two rocks on which these trees stood, two birds were in the air with a true love knot in their beaks.

On the panel were graven these words—

“True love ruins, true love mends,
Then shall L and F be friends,

When the cradle is rocked by the ocean's tide.
And the billows sing to the baby bride."

"There is of course no meaning in this dog-grel," said Mrs. Wybrow; "but Mr. Loftus would not have it removed for the world. He has odd fancies about old things in his family. I wish he would marry for he can afford it and it would settle him and make him much happier—but none but poor folks marry who ought to keep single."

"Is there no portrait of Mr. Loftus himself?" asked Clara.

"None," replied Mrs. Wybrow; "he never would sit, for he says he has no one who would care for his picture, and he should be ashamed to see it himself. I am sorry he does not come back while you are here. I dare say he will be away for months again, for though he sends very strict orders about his tenantry and takes care the poor shall have employ all the year round he does not care to stay here himself."

CHAPTER XIII.

I do believe 'twas he!

Othello.

WHEN Clara returned to Vernon House she could not help remarking a change in the manners of the partners to her, they were both more respectful and seemed to look upon her as having gained some consequence by her involuntary sojourn at Loftus Hall. They received Mrs. Wybrow with great distinction and when she requested to be allowed to call sometimes and inquire after Clara they were highly gratified. Clara felt happier than she had done since she left her friend Mrs. Fowler, and she could not but rejoice in the accident which had procured her the friendship of Mrs. Wybrow and the opportunity of smoothing the way for Maria's good reception by her future mother-in-law.

“Well, Miss Fane,” said Miss Philippa to her

when they were alone ; “ Clark has taken himself off—I’m sure neither you nor I will distress ourselves much about it. He has not behaved handsomely, for I’m sure he said such things to me that might have induced me to break off with poor Curtis—who is so mad about the accident and not to be called to the Hall. I’m sure Clark must have done it himself for spite.”

“ Do you mean that he let the horse loose ? ” asked Clara.

“ Yes,” said she ; “ he is capable of it, and I’m sure it was he who sent to tell Mr. Jenkins to go to the Hall. So ungrateful, when Curtis was the means of introducing him here and he’s got a good deal of employment through him. To be sure he’s gone off and has not waited to be paid, but he’ll come back or send fast enough no doubt for his money.”

“ Did you ever see Mr. Loftus ? ” asked Clara.

“ Once at the county ball,” said Miss Giles ; he’s such a handsome man ! I was to have danced with him but Lady Brixton, who wants to catch him for one of her daughters, contrived that he should not ask me, though I know he was dying to do so.”

“ Is he tall ? ” said Clara ; and what coloured hair and eyes ? ”

“ Oh, he is very tall—quite noble,” returned

Miss Giles; "taller than Curtis." the young apothecary was about five feet four. "rather high, but not to the poor; he spends a great deal of money in charity. I wonder if he will come to the county ball this year. We expect our invitation soon; it always comes about this time, you can't think how brilliant it is. Lady Brixton and her ugly daughters are sure to be there and try and get all the beaux, for she gives dinners, and men are such pigs! they would dance with anyone to get a dinner; there's nothing ethereal in them, it really is quite disheartening."

It was very soon after this conversation that the expected tickets were received by the two ladies and to their surprise an especial invitation for Miss Fane.

"I suppose they think she's a parlour boarder," said Mrs. Trumble; "she has such fine lady airs. I can't order her about as I could any other that's what provokes me; she has such a grand look and yet she speaks so soft and does all one wants too. I'll turn over a new leaf with her next half for I don't see why one is'nt to be misses in one's own house."

"Well really now," said Miss Giles; "its no harm her looking so stylish, because it seems more genteel that people should think we take a parlour boarder. She's always very conformable

and is not at all a flirt, which is what I cannot endure; she never tries to attract notice and does not interfere with other people's admirers."

"I don't think that she's had any opportunity, for I didn't know anyone here had admirers," retorted Mrs. Trumble.

Miss Philippa flounced out of the room in great indignation at this remark and consoled herself by going to look over her wardrobe in order to prepare something altogether irresistible against the eventful evening.

Clara was by no means glad that the invitation had been extended to her, but found that it would be considered a breach of all etiquette to decline the honour; she therefore submitted with a good grace, and, as the period approached, felt rather amused with the idea of seeing all the notabilities of the county, some of whose names she had heard, but few of whom she had seen.

There was Mr. Goldspin, the great speculator, who lived in a magnificent house not far from their village. His family consisted of two sons, and of a very proud mamma, devoted to scandal and a great advocate for propriety in her neighbours. The very vulgar papa was, however, not disliked in society, although his reputation amongst the peasantry and the poor was by no means enviable, as he practised economy in that

department of his dependencies rather than in his own house or at his own table. His two sons were both louts whom no training could improve; they disdained education and made it a jest, were good shots, hard riders, and *bon-vivants*, and, though both had been to college, they had come back clowns as they went, looked upon refinement as affectation and noble sentiments as "humbug" and "gammon." They were red whiskered, broad shouldered, square built, and noisy; one almost a transcript of the other in mind, person, and manners; laughed loud and talked little, but that little was uttered in an accent as broad as the lowest labourer on their estate.

Mr. Jack and Mr. Ben Goldspin, for they preferred being designated by their Christian names, hating humbug of all sorts, were by no means favourites in the county, as, independently of their coarse manners, they had little credit for liberality amongst their companions, wealthy as they were. In fact they were, in private, usually called "snobs" and "curmudgeons" by the young men, and "horrid bears" and "conceited louts" by the young ladies. Still, as they were known to inherit good fortunes, the elder from his father, and the younger from his mother, who was a city tradesman's daughter and an heiress, there were not wanting certain mammas who chid

their daughters for repulsing them, or certain misses who did their utmost to attract these excellent *partis*.

Mr. Goldspin was somewhat under the control of his wife, but he had his own way according to his own manner. He was very proud of his whole establishment, his wife's diamonds, particularly her stomacher, his wine, his mutton, his house, and everything in it. He had always procured all he possessed in a manner more surprising than ever happened to another person: he had more carved wood, got from more extraordinary places and belonging to more remarkable personages, than any one else could boast; his pictures were picked up in the most marvellous ways, discovered in old shops, covered with dust, and revived by his luminous orders.

"I take," he would say, "the dirty old canvass, I have it stretched on a table before me; then I make the fellows cut an onion in half, I have it dipped in beer, and scour the picture well. My Raphaels, my Carlo Dolcis, my Tempestas—look at 'em; there they are; did you ever see colours brighter or shadows clearer? Well, that's my method; I don't mind telling it."

He liked his wife to appear in her diamonds as often as opportunities would permit; consequently she was never seen in public without

them. At the races, for instance, Mrs. Goldspin shone in full brilliancy in the grand stand, the morning sun shining on her diamond brooch and the clasps of her bracelets, while her hands, as she helped herself to refreshments, were one blaze.

She was fully conscious of her own dignity and the importance of her own and her husband's wealth, and looked down with infinite contempt on most of the county families, professing also to be perfectly indifferent to the notice of the aristocracy of the neighbourhood, although her assiduity, her exaltation, and servility, whenever she came in contact with any of that separate race, somewhat belied her professions. Her great object was to suppress her city descent, avoiding all allusion to it as much as possible. She had many animosities and antipathies; one of the chief was Lady Brixton, whose husband having been Lord Mayor of London presented herself with a title which obliged her to yield precedence. She was likewise aware that Mrs. Goldspin's papa was an eminent pastry-cook who had died immensely rich, and this knowledge on her part was the thorn in her rival's side; so that when they encountered it was rare that thunders did not ensue, for Lady Brixton lost no opportunity of alluding to the very topic most dreaded by her contemporary.

Lady Brixton was a large, stout, bustling woman, with ruddy neck, shoulders, and elbows, of the most ample dimensions. She had naturally a very high colour which was heightened, or, as she thought, softened by rouge; she wore her own black hair in a profusion of ringlets, and prided herself on looking as young as her daughters, two of whom were out and two still in the nursery. Her late husband, the Lord Mayor, had left her very rich, so that she could compete with Mrs. Goldspin in any expense, which was extremely annoying to the latter. She professed to hold *parvenus* in contempt, talked of her own old city family, and her ambition was to ally one of her daughters, at least, with the aristocracy.

“None of your monied upstarts for me,” said she; “my gals shall marry amongst the best in the land. I’ve given ’em a good education and they needn’t turn their backs on any one for whatever money can buy.”

These daughters were daring, dashing girls, rather handsome on a coarse scale; they rode out with the hounds, cleared gates and fences with the best hunters, and could dance all night afterwards.

“They’re none of your hothouse plants,” the mother would say, “but all health and spirits. I’d match my gals against any in town or country for

following a fox, or playing on the harp; for working in Berlin wool, or cutting up a turkey; and that's what few can say now-a-days."

These were some of the notables of the neighbourhood: but there were other families of a higher grade whose pedestals were placed in more exalted niches: there were the Nettlebeds of Nettlebed Park, very stern and stately, an old name in the county extremely limited and select in their society; the Kingswoods of Kingswood, whose house outvied the oaks of their park in antiquity; and, above all, there was *the* illustrious family of Lord Derrington, who lived in the ancient mansion of their ancestors at Coombe Place, a monastic-looking house in a romantic hollow amongst the hills, surrounded by large trees. The old lord was a very dignified man who seldom visited anyone, and when encountered sometimes on the road solemnly pacing along, mounted on his black charger, he gave the idea of as grim a baron as feudal times could present.

Lady Derrington, if described by Mrs. Goldspin, who had a great respect for jewels and fine clothes and found a difficulty in comprehending why she should feel a respect for anyone who did not exhibit either, would have been represented as too plain for her rank both in her manners and her appearance.

“Why, her whole dress,” observed that lady to her husband, “is not worth so much as my last new apron from Paris. I wonder her ladyship likes to go about such a figure. I wouldn’t be seen in the scanty old gowns she wears; and I can’t think it in character to wait upon people as she does in her own house. The last time I called I met her, as I crossed the hall, carrying a glass of wine and a sandwich in a plate to that sick girl of Saunder’s, who was sitting on a chair there by the fire. She did look a little ashamed when she saw me, and well she might; she apologised by saying the servants were at dinner, as if the girl couldn’t have waited till they had done.”

Although this account of Lady Derrington’s conduct was perfectly true, even Mrs. Goldspin was obliged to confess that she was remarkably courteous and pleasing in her manner, and yet possessed an air of dignity which prevented intrusion or undue familiarity.

“I don’t understand how it is,” would Mrs. Goldspin remark, “she isn’t a bit proud, but yet I can never say my whole mind to her as I can to such upstarts as Lady Brixton; there is something so quiet and yet commanding about her that I am never able to get through any story I begin about the neighbours when I do it to

put her on her guard and keep up one's own dignity so as to keep the county select. Now, Miss Clinton I am sure *is* proud in spite of her humble airs—one can see it shining through—I don't attempt to understand *her*."

Perhaps Mrs. Godspin was not formed by nature or cultivation to understand the character of the Honorable Miss Isabella Clinton, the sole surviving child of Lord Derrington, and as she did not desire to be comprehended in certain quarters she perhaps gave but little opportunity for the study to some to her neighbours.

She was, in fact, not "of them" and though she occasionally appeared amongst them it was merely as a passer by, without a desire to linger in their vicinity more than necessity commanded, alhtough at the same time without a wish to impress persons who were quite indifferent to her, with any idea of her superiority either in rank or intellect.

Miss Clinton was no longer positively young, that is to say, she was past thirty, and no longer made pretensions to take her place with the youthful or the admired. The loss of several brothers and sisters, to whom she had been tenderly attached, had, by degrees, influenced her mind in such a manner as to withdraw it from those considerations and amusements which generally

cling to an age much more advanced than her own.

She had accustomed herself to look upon the affairs of love—that engrossing occupation of the young—as belonging to others rather than herself, and if she might occasionally have experienced a feeling approaching preference for any particular individual it soon passed away when she found that, owing to the habitual indifference she exhibited, she had failed to attract the notice which might have decided the bent of her inclinations.

She came, at length, to a somewhat false conclusion—that she was not formed either to feel or inspire an exclusive attachment; and though she was not a disbeliever in the existence of a passion which every-day experience proves can exercise such extraordinary influence over the destinies of the world, she regarded it as something unconnected with her own being, and only to be looked at philosophically in reference to others.

Her abstract idea of love was, perhaps, too full of purity and perfection for her ever to find it reality, and she often started with surprise to discover how incorrect had been her judgment of the feelings of another when she saw that the failings which were so palpable to her view were

not only invisible to that of others but were transformed, on the contrary, to advantages. She expected too much, both for herself and her friends, and was disappointed; but this was so far from spoiling her temper or chilling her heart that she was always ready to enter into the history of another's joys and sorrows, to give her sympathy, and to take an interest in those trials which she, in her own person, had no knowledge of.

“The world,” she would say, “appears to me to make half its woes; they are first created and then deplored. Impulse is followed and reason and reflection are neglected. The first act in love is to encourage romantic visions and to increase their colouring by every possible means instead of viewing things in a calm light without the sun-gilding which makes all objects, however insignificant, appear glorious. We live in a region of illusion, and we think it our happiness not to withdraw the veil; as every one is of the same mind it is of no use to contend, but though I do not partake of the bewilderment I have no desire to become a Cassandra.”

It resulted that Miss Clinton was generally liked and always admired for her fine qualities and excellent heart, but none of her male friends seemed to think that she expected to receive fur-

ther homage, and none of her female friends appeared to contemplate the possibility of her entering the lists with them.

This family of Lord Derrington was of real mark in the county, the rest were such as are common in all country neighbourhoods.

There were several young clergymen, some of good families, who made up the *beaux* at a ball or party, and sometimes they were recruited by a few officers from the adjacent towns, who were willing to dissipate the *ennui* of their country quarters' existence by patronising the society. It must be confessed that these generally preferred the good dinners and flirting daughters of Lady Brixton to the esteemed formal, and more dignified hospitality of Coombe Place, although without having been received there they were not invited to the ambitious widow's, who declared that she had an objection to "rubbish" and "nobodies."

On occasions like a race or county ball, there were generally some stranger friends of all these personages who ran down from London by the train to spend a few days with their friends, and these were of course most welcome visitors and made much of accordingly.

On the appointed night Clara had an opportunity of seeing all this society brought together in

the town-hall of the principal neighbouring town, and, as Mrs. Trumble's party went early, she was able to take her seat in a convenient position to observe the company as they severally arrived.

The room was handsome, spacious, and well-lighted, adorned with a profusion of fine flowers, and well-arranged in every respect. As the evening was warm and genial, and the moon was at the full, preparations had been made that it should be enjoyed. Two temporary rooms and several long balconies were filled with shrubs and flowers, and the windows were left open to them, so that these were retreats for flirtations and a resource from heat, both indispensable requisites in a well-regulated ball-room.

The stewards flourished about with white bows in their coats, and introductions and welcomes abounded; by degrees the room became filled with "beauty and fashion," and the animation increased, as the awe of some and the stiffness of others wore off.

Mrs. Trumble soon found acquaintances and exchanged greetings, and Miss Philippa was gratified, after waiting some time in much anxiety lest her rose-coloured crape should prove unattractive, by being asked to dance by Mr. Freeman the lawyer, an unmarried man, called handsome in his circle. Clara remained a spectatrice,

her sprained ankle affording her a pretext for declining to dance when solicited to do so by several attentive stewards, by whom her beauty had not passed unnoticed: she preferred seating herself near an open window, partially concealed by flowers and curtains, having induced Mrs. Trumble to remove her seat there, and to leave her in seclusion, when she occasionally took a turn in the room with her different friends.

Presently her attention was drawn to a noisy party in a balcony behind her, and the loud voices of the Brixton family made their vicinity known.

“I say, Kate,” cried the eldest Miss Brixton to her sister, “the captain swears he came down in the train with young Loftus; now I tell him he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. If he was down at the Hall we should see him here to-night, for what could he come for but to be at the ball. He’s a snob not to have been here before, but we’ve contrived to do well enough without him, haven’t we, captain?”

A very good-looking, high-coloured, moustachied, young man, in a handsome cavalry uniform, replied to this in a rumbling voice, interrupted by frequent laughter,—

“Why, yes, I flatter myself, ha! ha! we can get on pretty well without the assistance of country gentlemen, ha! ha! we haven’t been in India

ha! ha! to be melted away by the brightness of Derbyshire sun. I give you my honour, Miss Constantia, that I find your country a horrid bore, ha! ha! a deuced bore, indeed; how different from our balls in London, isn't it, best adored? If it wasn't for Lady B.'s capital dinners and her lovely daughter's perfections, I give you my honour I must cut this sort of thing. Let us dance, my divinity, and forget it."

"I won't dance a quadrille," replied Constantia, "I told you so before; I came into this balcony on purpose to have a bit of fun, and I hate that stupid formal dancing—no spirit, no life: give me a good whirling polka and a good crowd to whisk through. If one can knock down half-a dozen dummies so much the better."

"Ha! ha!" repeated the officer, "I give you my word you're inimitable! you're deuced inimitable. Let us quiz the boors, my adorable; how can you exist in a spot where such creatures as these for instance resort? What is the cognomen of that uncouth monster leading forth that ogress in pink?"

"That," cried Miss Constantia, "oh, that wretch is Ben Goldspin, dancing with some girl whose father has a vote. He's such-a mercenary wretch; he gave a dinner the other day without champagne; think of that with a pocket-full of gold!"

“ I trust he won't invite me to such feeds,” replied the officer ; “ my dear girl, it makes one sick to think of it.”

“ Good gracious !” cried Miss Kate, rushing up to her sister ; “ there he is ; I said so.”

“ Lord ! Kate, what a bawling you make,” returned the sister ; “ who do you mean ; one would think you'd seen a ghost.”

“ Why, so I have, for I've seen Loftus,” exclaimed Miss Kate, “ and here's mamma in full sail to tell us.”

In effect, Lady Brixton came sweeping up at the moment, calling out—

“ Now, gals, didn't I tell you he'd never let the ball go off without having a shot amongst you. Here's young Loftus, sure enough. Now, Kate, you come with me, for I see Stanny is better engaged.”

Miss Kate followed her mother, and Clara's eyes followed them to an open door, where stood a figure which she could not for a moment mistake : it was no other than the false Mr. Clark and the acquaintance of Rose Cottage. He was standing leaning against a pillar, and looking round him with an expression on his face almost of contempt, which he changed almost instantly to one of cheerfulness as Lady Brixton approached him, dragging her willing daughter with her.

“ Well, who’d have thought to see you here,” cried the lady putting out both her hands, “ I’m sure we are delighted that you thought proper to come after all ; but what a shabby trick to keep us in the dark so. Law ! Kate has asked after you so often—when *will* he come, ma ! where *can* he be, ma ! till I’m quite glad to get rid of her questions.”

“ Miss Kate does me great honour,” said Mr. Loftus ; “ will she prove the truth of her friendly expressions of anxiety by dancing with me ?”

“ To be sure she will,” cried the mother, “ and only too glad.”

Mr. Loftus led away the highly-dressed, handsome Kate, and a polka began, which caused the couple in the balcony to burst forth and join the tumultous assembly without. More than once Mr. Loftus and his partner whirled past Clara as she sat, but no glance towards her told that she was recognized. The dance over, Mr. Loftus led his partner to the very balcony near where she remained, and when he passed she was obliged to move her chair to give way to the pair as they took their seats close to her.

“ And what have you been doing in the country for this age ?” asked he of his companion.

“ Oh, the same things as usual,” replied Miss Kate, “ riding and driving, dancing and flirting,

by turns: that's the way to enjoy life. But where have you been? no one has seen you for an age; some said you had drowned yourself for love, and others that you were married."

"Love and marriage!" exclaimed he, "what a strange combination! How could you suppose me guilty of either; yet you separate them well too, for you accuse me of love in one instance and marriage in another."

"I don't accuse you, mind," answered the lady; "I only go by hearsay, and since you keep out of the way I've a right to believe anything."

"Believe anything, dear Miss Kate," replied her partner, "but that love has existence, or that marriage is to be desired. 'To a nunnery—go.'"

"Law bless me, how you go on!" said Miss Kate; "I never mean to turn nun; I ain't even a Puseyite yet; it'll be time enough for me when I look as pale and meagre as Miss Clinton: how *can* she dance with that booby, Jack Goldspin; I declare I thought she'd more pride."

"Oh, never believe in the pride of woman," returned her companion; "woman only acts upon caprice, never on principle; she will spurn a man to-day and fawn upon him to-morrow."

"You're grown quite a woman-hater, I declare, Mr. Loftus," said Miss Kate.

"I should be a woman-worshipper," replied

he, "if your sex were not so perverse. Come, let me take you to the supper-room; you must require a little ambrosia after so much exertion. I dare say you have danced all the evening."

"To be sure I have, and so has Stanny," answered she; "what does one come to a ball for? Well, I'm so glad you came; it's such fun. You'll give us a party at the Hall, I know," she added, archly.

Mr. Loftus laughed heartily, and he rose to conduct his partner, passing Clara again: his foot touched her dress as he moved along, he turned and bowed apologetically but without appearing to be aware who was sitting there, and continued to chat and laugh with his partner till both were lost in the crowd.

Clara saw him several times again during the evening, but he did not seem to know her; he spoke to Miss Giles in the supper-room, and even handed her a seat while Clara stood beside her, but he did not in any way betray a consciousness of her presence.

"La!" said Miss Philippa, "I thought Mr. Loftus would have said something about your accident, Miss Fane, and ask you how you were. I suppose he doesn't know you in your ball dress—oh, here he comes again with Mrs. Goldspin on his arm, I'll get you introduced if you like."

“Not for the world,” exclaimed Clara, laying her hand on Miss Philippa’s arm to arrest her; “I would much rather not.”

“Well, it seems ungrateful in you, after he took such care of you too,” said Miss Philippa. “Well, he certainly is very handsome—what eyes he has—as if he’d look one through, and then—such a presence! How pleased that proud Mrs. Goldspin looks to be noticed by him; she has never bowed to us the whole evening, and always pretends to be near-sighted. She’s staring now full at Lady Brixton as if she didn’t see her—good gracious! if the two are not going to quarrel we shall be lucky.”

CHAPTER XIII.

Roxana and Statira!—they are names
That must for ever jar.

When they encounter
Thunders should ensue.

Lee.

Who is the maid my spirit seeks?

St. Jerome.

THE rivals, meantime, were standing face to face, too close to carry on the pretence of not seeing each other, which, indeed, Mr. Loftus seemed resolved to prevent by purposely putting them in each other's way.

“What a mixture we have to-night,” said Mrs. Goldspin haughtily; “I wonder there isn't a better regulation about people being admitted to these balls; one doesn't know who one may meet.”

“Ah! my dear Lady Brixton,” exclaimed Mr. Loftus, still holding the arm of her rival, “there

you are again. I have been looking for you to congratulate you on the looks of both your daughters; they improve every time I see them. I was just telling Mrs. Goldspin I thought so."

The two ladies bowed to each other as stiffly as possible, not being able to avoid it as he thus associated them, but they looked daggers at each other.

"I am thinking," continued Mr. Loftus, "of profiting by a friendly hint thrown out by Miss Kate, and trying to get up a breakfast at my old ruined hall. If I might depend on you both to do the honours for me I would venture on asking the beauties of the county to enliven my melancholy shades."

"What! kick up a hop!" screamed Lady Brixton, "and the gardens all so beautiful at this season. Well, my Kate has a spirit—she knew who she was talking to when she gave her hint—sly puss! Law! how glad the gals will be. To be sure, as far as regards me, I'll do my best to make things go off well and on well too."

"You do not reply, my dear Mrs. Goldspin," said Mr. Loftus aside to the lady; "I hope I may reckon also on you. You know," said he, in a confidential tone, "it will be to you I should chiefly look—one of the first county families, one who knows all the best society, with your experi-

ence, too, of what a *fête* should be; your taste and Lady Brixton's spirits," he added, turning to her, "with these I shall be certain to succeed. We poor bachelors, you know, are such helpless beings, without the help of beauty."

"Ah!" cried Lady Brixton, tapping him with her fan, "you're a deceiver; you could easily remedy that evil if you liked—with all the girls dying for you."

"Well, I may rely on both, then," said Mr. Loftus, "it's a bargain. Now, then, I must go and make friends at Coombe Place, and secure other patronage. I dared not do so till I was sure of my two chief allies."

So saying, he bowed, and left the two ladies together.

"We shall be sure of plenty of champagne," said Lady Brixton, sarcastically, "and everything done in style at Loftus Hall; nothing like your true aristocracy for doing things well; no skimping nor screwing there. How well your two sons are looking to-night, ma'am," added she, with affected interest."

Mrs. Goldspin bit her lip, the sarcasm on the champagne having succeeded. "Mr. Loftus was saying the same of your young ladies," replied she; "how is Miss Constantia after her fall the other day? I was always afraid she might suffer

from such dangerous rides. They tell me she pulled the fox out of the hole herself; it was a daring thing to do; suppose it had bit her! I wonder the captain let her expose herself so. When is *that* to take place, my lady! We all know it's to be."

"Do you mean Stanny's marriage with Captain Brighty!" replied my lady; "the world's very fond of knowing other people's concerns; some say Kate's to be Mrs. Loftus too; we shall see what'll happen in time; stranger things have turned up. Whenever my daughters do marry it'll be to real gentlemen anyhow. None of your make-believes, all glitter and no substance, nor none of your country boors neither—that's just as bad. Give me good birth and old aristocracy; that's what they with their fortunes and faces may look to. I'm of as good a City of London family myself as any in England, and I'm not ashamed to own it. We didn't get our money speculating, but in fair trade, like true-born Britons. What's the country without the city I should like to know? We are the pillars of the state after all. As your poor dear father used to say to mine when he was serving him out a basin of soup behind the counter, for my father often stopped as he was going to 'Change, and took something at his shop to encourage him a bit in his beginning;

‘we tradesmen,’ said he, ‘are the corner-stones that support the fabric: it would soon crumble away, like pie-crust, if it wasn’t for us,’ and my father used to pay his sixpence and say, joking, ‘you’ll puff yourself into notice some day.’”

“I was too young at that time,” said Mrs. Goldspin, fuming and fanning herself, “to know anything of mercantile affairs; my sphere was soon elevated, and I never care to be reminded of things so far back, which circumstances have since effaced. Worth in my opinion is everything; as to birth I have a contempt for it. I should like to know which is best—an empty title or a full purse. As long as I can open the one I care little for the pride of the other.”

At this moment the rivals were accosted by the grave and dignified Lord Derrington, on whose arm hung his stately daughter. He had laid aside much of his pomp for the evening, and was in a humour to be condescending. He accosted the two ladies with friendly familiarity, and having offered his arm to Mrs. Goldspin, inviting her to promenade, he requested Lady Brixton to take care of his daughter till her partner, Mr. Loftus, came to claim her.

The exultation of the diamond-stomached lady, as she sailed along the room on the arm of the Lord, could not be concealed, and Lady Brix-

ton watched her with malicious eyes as she followed with Miss Clinton, whose quiet subdued manner at once awed her into a tone more in accordance with the rank of her present companion.

“Do you know who that very graceful girl is?” asked Miss Clinton, looking at Clara, who was walking with Mrs. Trumble just before them. “I have seen her, I am sure, before. Did she not meet with some accident at the Well-flowering; I think it is the same, though she looks paler than I thought her then.”

“Law; I did hear of the accident,” said Lady Brixton, “and she was taken to the Hall and nursed by Mrs. Wybrow. I see her at church every Sunday with the school; I suppose she’s a parlour boarder.”

“She is very superior looking,” said Miss Clinton; “let us speak to Mrs. Trumble; I know her but little, but will make an excuse. I should like to be acquainted with that young person; she pleases me.”

The next time they met, Miss Clinton bowed to Mrs. Trumble, who stopped, extremely gratified at the notice taken of her.

“I believe we are old acquaintances,” said Miss Clinton; “I was formerly admitted to your school-room to hear Mr. Glibwell’s lectures. Is

be likely soon to come again? I hope you will patronize him as you did before; I hear he is in the county, and lecturing on poetry and geology. Will you permit me to attend his lectures if he should come."

"Only too proud, I'm sure, madam," replied Mrs. Trumble, getting very red and agitated in the nasal feature, which always showed her feelings.

"I hope," said Miss Clinton, addressing Clara, as they walked side by side along the room, "you have recovered your accident. Am I not right in thinking it was you whom Mrs. Wybrow took away in her carriage at the Well-flowering? I am afraid you will think us country folks very rough and careless to occasion you so much fear, and pain too."

"Miss Fane, I'm sure, madam, is very much obliged to you," said Mrs. Trumble.

Clara answered for herself with thanks for her kind inquiries, and by degrees they became acquainted, pursuing their promenade together, and leaving Mrs. Trumble to the honour of companionship with Lady Brixton.

They took seats, after a time, in the balcony where they could now look on the full beauty of the moonlight.

"How enjoyable," said Miss Clinton, "are

such nights as these, in England; besides their own beauty they recal that of other regions, where summer has a longer and a more powerful reign. I have enjoyed such at Venice, on the broad lagune: and at Como, on that enchanting lake, yet this fine blaze of glory, even though it is reflected only on the houses and chimneys of a town, reminds me of scenes of greater beauty and has its own charm besides."

"Nature and her accessories," said Clara, "exercise the same spell everywhere. One can, with the help of a little fancy, transform those distant roofs into mountains, those spires into icy peaks, and those dim streets into shadowy vallies—what would be too much revealed in the glare of sunshine this mysterious moonlight shrouds in uncertainty and lends interest to."

"Sunshine is like everyday existence, it makes the truth too evident and renders commonplace what the moon invests with a solemn mystery, which must be studied to be understood," replied Miss Clinton, "what we comprehend at a glance interests us no more; it is that which presents some difficulties to the imagination which leads one on with pleasure. Like the study of the German language—startling at first from its difficulty, but opening, when once the veil is withdrawn, a world of new light and enjoyment. Even the

uncouth sounds that at first shock the ear become musical when their full meaning is understood. No wonder the Germans are the best translators of the Eastern poets, their genius is so similar."

"How well Von Hammer had rendered for instance," said Clara, "the dispute between day and night, so ingeniously set forth by the Persian poet."

"Ah, I remember it," cried Miss Clinton with animation, "where poor night is called 'negro face' and loaded with abuse by envious day."

"It might after all," said Clara, smiling, "require the great Schah himself to decide to which the palm of superiority should be given."

"I range myself on the side of night, positively," said Miss Clinton, "and shall hope often to have an opportunity to continue the contemplation of it with you. I hope our acquaintance, though begun in a perfect blaze of light, will not the less endure. I fear my partner will be searching for me now; therefore must say adieu till we meet again. I assure you, Miss Fane, I cannot resolve to relinquish easily, so rare an advantage as a pleasing companion in the midst of our solitudes."

As Miss Clinton stepped from the balcony at the sound of the music, which roused all the loungers, Clara saw Mr. Loftus approaching; he

entered immediately into an animated conversation with his new partner, without appearing to be in the least acquainted with her vicinity. Presently the quadrille begun, and she saw them no more. She was not alone long; for she was joined in her retreat by Mrs. Goldspin, who having observed Miss Clinton talking familiarly with her, was suddenly seized with a desire to make her acquaintance.

“May I beg you, Miss, to lend me your fan?” said she, in a very respectful tone, “I see you are not using it, and I have just broke mine; Lord Derrington was so kind as to pick up the sticks of it, which I contrived to snap as I was conversing with him. A charming nobleman is Lord Derrington, isn’t he Miss?”

Clara bowed, without attending to the latter remark, which she saw clearly was intended as a leading question to discover how far she was intimate with the family; she gave her own fan with ready good nature, regretting that Mrs. Goldspin had broken her own.

“Ah!” said the lady, “I don’t mind about it, though it did cost a great deal; those sort of fans are so expensive, but I have several others all as good, for I never wear anything shabby or paltry; indeed, as Mr. Goldspin says, why should I with his fortune? and I think when one possesses

the blessing of wealth the least one can do is to spend it."

"Certainly," said Clara, "wealth is a blessing when it falls into generous hands. Providence gives it in trust to be well used for the benefit of others."

"Exactly so," replied Mrs. Goldspin, facetiously, "and a little for oneself too, I think, is no harm. One should encourage trade, particularly these sad times when so many poor creatures are out of work. I'm sure the money we spend in this county is unknown, but I never grudge it, for, as Mr. Goldspin observes, it is sure to tell one way or other, and if the poor were not supported by the rich where would the rich be in the end! why, they would rise and try to better themselves at our expense."

At this moment, Mr. Jack Goldspin made his appearance, and addressing his mother with a lively air, called out—

"Oh, you're there old girl, are you? Ben and I thought it time to cut our sticks; we've had enough of humbug. We're going home to a jolly supper after all these flim flams, only fit for butterflies. Come along; I'm sure you don't want to stay any longer."

"My dear Jack," said his mother reprovingly, "don't be so wild; I was talking philosophy to

this young lady, a particular friend of the Honourable Miss Clinton's, when you interrupt us with your exuberant spirits."

"Fiddlesticks! begging the lady's pardon," replied Mr. Jack; "I dare say she's a woman of sense, and would rather have plain English than such jargon. Philosophy! what's the use of such humbug; it won't clear a five-barred gate, I'll be bound, nor cut a field of wheat, nor fatten pigs. What do you know about it, mother, I wonder."

"You are so droll, dear!" returned the mother, and turning to Clara, and introducing him, she added, "my son, Mr. John Goldspin; I'm sure you'll like his frankness; he and his brother are all nature; quite diamonds in the rough, as my lord says."

"We're all in the diamond way, aint we, mother?" exclaimed her son, attempting to be witty, and succeeding according to his mother's notions of the commodity.

"Why, I will say, John," replied she, "that as far as diamonds go, I do flatter myself that there are not many in the county can make the show I can. All belonging to our family, miss, descending from mother to daughter."

"No doubt," said Clara; "they appear to be very fine;" but her eye, as she spoke, was seeking Mrs. Trumble, for she began to weary of the

entertainment, and to hope it was nearly concluded.

She saw Mr. Loftus no more, and as soon as Miss Philippa could be persuaded to relinquish her last chance of another beau, she willingly departed from the scene of festivity, and was not sorry to find herself once more in her own small room, which she was obliged, for the present, to consider *home*.

“He is,” she mused, “indeed, a singular character—wilful and capricious, intrusive and retiring, at once. I cannot see his motive in seeking me under obstacles and avoiding me when they no longer exist. However, he and his conduct are quite indifferent to me, at least they would be so but for the obligation he forced on me, but Mrs. Wybrow said he did not like to be thanked.”

Mr. Loftus, soon after the scene described, wrote thus to one of his most intimate friends:—

“No one better than yourself knows how little I am subject to be carried away by enthusiasm. You know, in fact, that I am more inclined to ridicule as infirmity that proneness to admire which belongs to others; you have seen me coldly examine grace and beauty and ask why they made such vivid impressions on some minds—to ask a reason for this fact was proving at once that

I had not arrived at the power of comprehending the power that subdued the wisest. I do not confess to you that I am now as weak as those whom I formerly condemned, but I am beginning to understand the possibility of passion getting the better of reason, and I am now occupied in striving to subdue the tendency.

“To say ‘I love’ is a folly, and means I am content to be a fool; one should rather say I am yielding to impressions; accept then a confession from me. I have seen a person who appears to be the *ideal* I have sought so long. It is not that she has more beauty, more genius, more taste, grace, or wisdom, than many I have known, but I feel myself more ready to acknowledge these qualities in her. I fear, indeed, that I create some of them, and that is the reason I distrust myself.

“I have seldom heard her speak, and, if I have, it has generally been in an accent of offence or restraint, with indifference or coldness; nevertheless, she appears to me overflowing with sense, tenderness, goodness, and sensibility. She has no reason to prefer me, except for the same cause that she attracts me.

‘Parceque je suis moi, et qu’elle est elle.’

“You well know that there is not much romance

in my composition, yet I like that my life should be carried on like a romance, and I enjoy being placed in the position of those active and resolute personages, who, at all hazards, will create around them a world of action. As I know that, in spite of every precaution, the best laid plans of life are destroyed in an instant by the merest accident, I desire to give full career to events which I cannot control, and if I am supine myself, to let action influence me.

“ Does this sound like nonsense? I suspect so, but you have always been indulgent to me, and since you are, in some sort, the cause of my present feeling—

‘ Call it madness—call it folly.’

you must endure the full weight of my weakness.

“ There are, say philosophers, two sorts of *dénouemens* in the drama of life—marriage and death: of the latter we are certain, whether we will or no; the other, perhaps, we can avoid if we try, and I have always wished to do so. I am striving hard still, for which reason I do nothing to seduce, to charm, to attract. I absent myself from the beloved presence, that is, I intend in future to do so: I believe I took originally a bad method of presenting myself; it may turn out a fatal one.

“ If the stars have no influence on our actions how came it that she and I should encounter each other as we did at your fantastic abode at Twickenham, where all was vision and imagination? You cannot have forgotten the new face, discovered and produced by La Frilletta, to make a moment’s sport—the beautiful girl, who sang so well.

“ Where was she picked up? I, whose code has been the sublimity of uncertainty, now desire to ascertain so trivial a fact. I have all the respect due to your fascinating *quasi* sister-in-law, who amuses you, and ‘does her spiriting gently,’ but I should prefer not choosing a wife offered me by her.

“ This, you will think, suspicious and mean, and not at all philosophical; it is so; but when I entertained myself for a moment with your attractive guest, she was nothing to me; now, circumstances are altered, she is ——, but while I am endeavouring to prevent her being anything to me, she occupies all my thoughts, all my plans, all my future.

“ I know nothing of her birth, her station, her antecedents; she seems alone in life, she is dependent on her own exertions, perhaps for her daily existence. Hard lot! and how to lighten it? Aye, there’s the rub.

“‘All that is agreeable is forbidden,’

say the Easterns. Can it be forbidden for me to give? no; but for her to receive? yes. Why have I no maiden aunt who wants a companion—no sister who wants a governess for her daughters? I cannot bring her into my sphere; I fear to harm her by exerting a spell—generous lover that I am! I have then only to fly her, leave her to her own difficulties and struggles, and trust to time to reveal her in all her perfections, and to fate to crown me while I sleep. Let it be so; but if your philosophy can teach me a remedy for this new-born uneasiness, impart the same to your willing pupil. I know you are too profound to treat the smallest trifle in the great theatre of atoms with contempt.”

To this letter Mr. Loftus received the following answer:—

“You are aware that I never interfere with the arrangements of La Frilletta—it would be too much to control the motions of so eccentric a planet—she comes and goes, and acts as she pleases; merely when I am weary either of her or the expense she brings on me, I put an end to the *ennui* by leaving her to herself, as was the case at my villa on the Thames, where she carried on her caprices and

‘Fooled me to the top of my bent.’

Sometimes my female guests were actresses, sometimes women of good society, who choose to pass a few hours in a sort of masquerade, but as my principle is never to inquire, since

‘ That all nameless hour,’

when I found inquiry fruitless to revive my bruised heart and extinguished hopes, I knew not who the luminaries might be who cheered my abode by their presence.

“ On the evening, however, to which you allude, my sister-in-law, for so you well know she has really a right to be called, told me that her adventure of the day before was a singular one: she had more than once practised the stratagem, but seldom before succeeded. By answering advertisements she was enabled to see strangers; she had an interview under certain pretences, as the case might be and according to the appearance of the person she beheld, she acted. This time she felt so sure of her quarry, from the simplicity of the girl and the singular ignorance of the world in the aunt, mother, or guardian, that she was able to enact her farce admirably; she created a Dorine—she brought them to the villa—they played the part she set them, and all was over. She did them no harm and made amusement for us.

“ I confess I have myself often thought since

of that beautiful girl, and that she should have wakened up your imagination I am not surprised. I advise you to pursue your adventure; it may lead to happiness. My doctrine is, as you know, a pure one: I adore beauty, and I hold it in reverence because it is the symbol of a sacred thing; to harm or injure it is to break your idol and to destroy your mystic worship.

“ I hold that love, properly so called, exalts the mind towards the divinity, that it excites to noble actions and conducts to them; without the shame of evil and the emulation of good, nothing is achieved. This perception is given to all; we are all aware of the existence of good and ill, and we are free to follow either as we please.

“ Love is the most ethereal of beings, the most subtle of essences, and only attaches itself to that which is as pure and immaterial as itself, passing by all of grosser kind; it has an existence of perfume and flowers, and avoids all that shocks the senses or fails to embellish them.

“ To me was once given the realization of this blissful vision; it was shown me and snatched away; since then I have lived upon its recollection, and since I can find Love no more, it is in the Beautiful I take refuge. You have yet to find the truth after which you seek, and, if one can judge by a lovely countenance, and the

appearance of all the virtues in an outward form, you may be thought in the direct path. As in the marble block exists the statue which genius calls forth to life, so is the divine nature held captive in an earthly frame. Gleaming white and radiant over the limped waters of the Lago Maggiore rises the glorious rock with its defaced surface, so disturbed to give egress to the fairy structure, which a century has prepared to adorn Milan, the most graceful of cities. A spirit capable of comprehending that which existed in the snowy quarry of the lake sought and found its treasures.

‘The mind that seeks will always find.’

“The purer matter becomes as it starts into beauty the readier is it understood by the soul worthy of appreciating it. It is true that corporeal perfection is only a first step towards the great attainment of moral beauty; we begin our career on earth and are therefore forced to admire earthly charms; they lead us on, for we are ever advancing, and the nearer we arrive at the hidden truth we seek, the purer and more transparent grows the butterfly we chase till its form is absorbed before us and its essence alone remains. That essence is enough for our purified minds; thus when the body’s beauty is evaporated by time and age, that

of the mind is seen with greater clearness, and shines without an intervening veil.

“ Virtue and truth are beauty, and he is blest whose vision is sufficiently pure to recognise them where they exist.

“ Therefore do I seek in every beautiful object in nature, and in art, which is another form of nature, for the type of that immortal grace which having once descended to earth, has left its seeds behind, which spring eternally, and produce a flower whose blossoms send their fragrance to the stars, and are there absorbed into them.

“ I am in love with the sea in all its varied moods; its sublime anger, its delicious calm; I am in love with silver cataracts and rushing torrents—I do not wonder at the worship paid them, and the fancied nymphs and fairies who have been thought to make them their abodes. Mountains with their severe beauties of snow and ice, and their fascinations of verdure and wood inspire me with love; colours and light, song and dance, all sounds of harmony, all touch, and scent, and feeling, which convey delight—with them I am in love, and thus a present Paradise is ever with me—conducting to that other which all souls who diligently pursue are sure to attain.

“ Surrounding all these beautiful objects of the lower world are regrets, and sorrows, and

dangers, and suffering; these will be unknown hereafter; these we must pass by as we may, changing them as they beset us into other forms, and making their deformities less conspicuous. There is nothing but evil that cannot afford some pleasure.

“Where evil exists in act or thought, beauty cannot be perceived—love can have no existence.

“Pursue the ideal you have created until it becomes reality: trust in the certainty of its development if it is genuine—where the seed and the sun is the plant will flourish; keep always in mind that the air round love must be pure and the stream must be of crystal that waters and nourishes it.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“All that I have now to say to you is that Love is a traitor, who may involve you in difficulties from which you will never be able to extricate yourself.

Arabian Nights.

THE whole neighbourhood was soon occupied in preparations for the *déjeuner* to be given in the grounds of Loftus Hall, and great were the anxieties of all who felt uncertain whether or not the invitations would be extended to them. It appeared, however, that Mr. Loftus was determined to gain golden opinions from all sorts of people, for he had left out no one who could, by possibility, be admitted, rightly judging that in a great crowd the least distinguished would be lost in the brilliancy of the many.

It was at dinner, soon after the county ball, that the family of Goldspin were conversing together on past and coming events, when the subject of Miss Fane was discussed.

“ I cannot think who she is,” said Mrs. Goldspin, “ she is certainly a very elegant girl, and she seems quite at home with the Honourable Miss Clinton, she has a manner not much unlike her’s, perhaps she’s a relation. I don’t think I could do wrong in having her invited to the Hall, but I’m sure I shan’t ask those governesses. The company ought to be quite select, and, as far as concerns me, I will keep it so ; I can’t answer for what that vulgar Lady Brixton may do. I am surprised at Mr. Loftus associating her with me ; he might as well have named Lady Derrington ; it would have been more in keeping, I think.”

“ But Lady Derrington never goes out, you know,” said her husband, “ so that couldn’t be ; besides, if Mr. L. is sweet upon one of those girls it is but natural he should be civil to the mother.”

“ I’m surprised to hear you talk in so indelicate a way,” said Mrs. Goldspin tartly ; “ is it likely that such tomboys should attract a man of such refinement. They are grown positively hideous, and, as for their manners, they are not fit for decent society.”

“ Well,” exclaimed Mr. Ben, “ I’ll tell you what, I will say that I think there’s less nonsense and humbug about them than most gals ; I enjoy teasing them and bringing out their spirit, and plenty of it they’ve got, I promise you.”

“ Yes,” added Mr. Jack, “ spirit, indeed ! I should be sorry to offend one of ’em ; they’d mind knocking a fellow down no more than looking at him.”

“ Well,” replied the brother, “ I like ’em little enough, but I hate your prim, stiff, genteel girls that won’t waltz and can’t ride.”

“ Don’t you admire, Miss Fane ?” asked his mother.

“ Oh ! she’s a fine girl ; there’s no denying it,” returned the youth ; “ but, somehow, I never feel at home with those sorts of lasses that have such a grand way with ’em. I can talk fast enough with either of the Brixtons, even if we do have tiffs, but I can’t get up a word with such a fine phoenix as Miss Fane, meek as she looks. I’d rather be pitched over a gate any day than face such dainty beauties as that.”

“ You’ll never make your way with the ladies, Jack,” said his father, “ if you go on so. If I’d had your over modesty I should never have been the man I am ; your mother would’nt have looked at me.”

“ Well, I think love and courtship, and all that’s humbug,” said Jack. “ If ever I marry, so as my wife’s sober, honest, and a good cook, it’s all I shall care for.”

This sally created great laughter in the com-

pany, except from Mrs. Goldspin, whose delicacy was shocked at the want of refinement her sons displayed.

“Are we expected to go to this priggish breakfast?” asked Mr. Ben: “what a bore it is. I hate that fellow, Loftus; he always looks as if he thought us not good enough to enter his presence. He now is one of your fine stuck-up ones, that pretend to be so civil, and is so full of humbug.”

“I can’t think what you call humbug, Ben,” said his mother; “Mr. Loftus is quite a pattern to all young men, both in conduct and manners. I wish you’d take pattern by him a little, instead of the set you belong to, which I’m sure, though Cambridge men, are far from genteel.”

“Not genteel, mother,” said the son, “why they’re the very tiptops of elegance. I hope some of them will be here to go with us to this boring party, or I’m sure it’ll be *no go* for us.”

Another burst of laughter from the brother and father of the punster enlivened the table, and Mrs. Goldspin’s objections to the Cambridge friends of her enlightened sons were allowed no further development.

At Lady Brixton’s, meanwhile, a colloquy of a similar subject was being carried on between the mother and daughters.

“Now, Kate,” said the mother, “you must do what you can to bring him to book on this occasion; he was clearly a good deal struck the other night; he’s a charming man, and has plenty of money, besides being of a capital old family. When you are mistress of the hall we’ll have brisk doings, shan’t we my dear. How mad it’ll make the Goldspins!”

“Aye, trust me for that,” said Miss Kate, “and see if I don’t nail him this time; he’s rather slippery and shifts about a good deal in spite of the fine compliments he pays; but he knows how to give good broad hints, and he said the other night he should adore me if he didn’t think all women were jilts. I vow I won’t dance with anybody but him, and as for that Ben Goldspin, if he asks me, I’ll refuse him flat before the other’s face.”

“Captain Brighty has, of course, engaged me for the first two sets,” said Miss Constantia, “and I’ll let him know too that it’s just as well not to shilly shally with me too long; if he doesn’t speak out I’ll flirt, as sure as he’s born, with one of the others.”

“I should like to know what Brighty’s got to trust to?” said her mother, “it isn’t gold epaulets that’ll keep the pot boiling; and my daughter’s husband must have as good a fortune as her own or it’ll never do.”

“Aye, but birth you know, mamma,” said Miss Stanny, “anybody may have money, but blood’s another thing, and I’m sure Brighty’s very high.”

“Yes, he looks it,” replied Lady Brixton, “I wouldn’t however advise you to go too far till we find out about him, you’ve no occasion to throw yourself away to the first bidder.”

“No, no,” replied Miss Stanny, laughing, “I don’t mean—he’s not the first by a dozen—and perhaps I shall have a dozen more if he doesn’t look sharp. Do you mean to invite that Miss Fane, mamma? One doesn’t know who she is, she didn’t dance the other night, I wonder where she sprang from! She’s not bad looking,” added Miss Stanny, glancing in the glass and settling her curls, “at least for that style of person. Brighty said he didn’t think much of her though.”

“Her hands and feet are like dolls’,” said Miss Kate, “quite out of proportion and her eyes are too large and she’s too pale. I suppose she’s a friend of Miss Clinton’s, I saw them talking together.”

“Did you?” said the mother, “oh, then we must ask her I suppose, though I must take the opinion of that purse-proud Madam Goldspin about everything, as she’s put in command as well

as me. But there's no occasion to fill up the list with governesses I should imagine, so I shall vote against that sort."

The calculations of these two ladies' patronesses were however defeated, in the instance of the party at Vernon House, by a note which had been dispatched by Miss Clinton, specially inviting the three and moreover proposing to take Clara with her, as she had a seat in her carriage to offer.

"Well I'm sure," said Mrs. Trumble, "that girl's head 'll be turned; they all treat her as if she was a great lady; I'll take an opportunity of letting Miss Clinton know she's only my teacher, or else I shall never get on with her next half. She's been a good deal stuck up, I fancy, ever since that Clark flattered her about her picture. I wish he'd afinished it, there it is now, no good to anybody; but he shan't have it without he ends all the work he began."

Clara was a good deal surprised at the invitation, and pleased at the chance of renewing an acquaintance with Miss Clinton, to whom she felt attracted, from the contrast she offered to the commonplace minds with which she was daily associated. She had resolved in her own mind not to continue with Mrs. Trumble after Midsummer, as from the report of Charlotte she found

that that lady proposed many reforms in the school to which she had no inclination to submit. The prospect held out to her by her friend Eugenie Petit, she thought offered her a wider field for her talents; for the irksomeness daily increased of various petty details to which she was the more subjected, by the preoccupation of Miss Philippa, whose intention was evidently to change her state as soon as possible, and who shifted the trouble of tuition to her hands as much as she could. To be left entirely to Mrs. Trumble she felt would be infinitely worse, and she resolved to prevent that alternative. She no longer feared persecution from Mr. Loftus, but the singular position in which she stood towards him disturbed her, and she felt that it would be better to absent herself from a spot where his presence would be a continued source of agitation to her mind.

“I shall probably see him for the last time at this fête,” thought she, “and as he will of course notice me no more than before, I need not make myself uneasy about the affair. His conduct is, however, sufficiently strange.”

“And now, my dear Mrs. Wybrow,” said Mr. Loftus, as he finished his survey of the preparations for the fête within the house at Loftus Hall, “I have only to thank you for your clever

arrangements and to beg you to tire and trouble yourself as little as you can during the gaieties. I wish my friend William were to be one of the guests to-day, he is probably threading the mazes of some pyramid, or exploring some island of the Nile, at this moment. By the way, did not you tell me that Miss Fane knew him? she is, I think, invited here to-day? you will show her any civility you can, since she is an acquaintance of William's, she is not, *par hazard*, his intended, is she?"

"Oh no," replied Mrs. Wybrow, "I wish she was, she is exactly the sort of person I should have chosen for him, so full of grace and taste and genius, and so amiable and cheerful too. However," added she, with a sigh, "she knows Maria Spicer, the young girl he has actually engaged himself to, and she reports favourably of her."

"This Miss Fane then pleases you," continued Mr. Loftus, "did she tell you anything of her history? did she mention where she came from, and who she is?"

"She is an orphan, it seems," replied she, "and has never known her parents, her story seems romantic as far as I heard her allude to it. She was a foundling, and has been brought up by two sisters at Llangollen, who have educated her."

"Her very name then is not her own!" said Mr. Loftus, musing. "What right have people

to adopt foundlings and send them on the world? who knows what blood they have? the parents may have been outcasts, felons, who is to know! some secret sin may be in their nature which education cannot remove."

"Dear sir," said Mrs. Wybrow, smiling, "what a singular thought, Miss Fane has more the look of being a nobleman's daughter than a low man's. She is all grace in manners and mind."

"You cannot know, my dear friend," returned he, "she might have worn a mask as, forgive me, I fear most women do to suit a purpose. Do you remember how lovely, how pure, how innocent and simple, charming Lady Emma Wyngrave looked, and was believed to be till she ran off with her sister's husband? and the pious and angelic Caroline Craven, whose conversation was so edifying, she finished her career by stealing her friend's diamonds; and sweet Christina St. Leger, whose care of her sick father was exemplary, she eloped with the doctor one fine evening, leaving him fast in the gout; and—"

"Oh, these are extraordinary examples," exclaimed Mrs. Wybrow, "and are like accidents on railroads which, because they are made public, appear so frequent, when the reverse is the case, in comparison with those that occurred to the

conveyances of former times. Your last proposition, too," said she, "destroys your first, your case against foundlings is done away with, since the birth and parentage of the ladies you have named is sufficiently well known. Ah, my dear sir, you would not have those prejudices against our sex, if you had had the advantage of intimate female society, an only child and an orphan, you never knew us, and cannot do us justice."

"You are the exception in this instance," said he, smiling; "I must at least acknowledge that one good woman exists, and I have a grudge against you for destroying my theory, which I nevertheless confess I am not stubborn in."

"Become a married man," replied Mrs. Wybrow, "and your prejudices and bachelor habits will evaporate together."

"Aye, but where to choose?" replied Mr. Loftus; "shall I try to-day?—there are the handsome Miss Brixtons—the pretty Miss Bakers—the lively Miss Lowtous—the serious and sensible Miss Clinton, but she is not pretty nor young, and unfortunately I am so contradictory in my desires."

"I think Miss Fane, the foundling, far beyond any," said Mrs. Wybrow, "but she, of course, is out of the question, as much as all the others you have named. Mr. Loftus isn't obliged

to come to a country town's society to choose his wife, when the first families in the kingdom would be proud of his alliance."

"Yes, that is the misfortune," murmured he; "a man is never loved for himself; circumstances give him value, without which he would be unnoticed. No! I am destined to a single life, that is clear. This is my farewell of England for some time, and we shall see what adventures may attend me abroad. I am going to join my friend, Sir Anselm Fairfax, at Venice in a few weeks, and together we will fly from the every-day world to scenes 'new and strange,' which will soon dissipate the *ennui* I always feel as soon as I set my foot on the shores of our sombre, steady, moral, excellent, best-of-all-possible islands—loved at a distance with a patriot's affection, and quitted with the indifference of a stepson."

Clara Fane

Chapter XV
Chapter XV

CHAPTER XV.

See! the whole assemblage of slender plants, pointing to the bower with fingers of young leaves agitated by the gale, make signals to thee!

Songs of Jayadeva.

THERE was everything at the *fête champêtre* at Loftus Hall which could be desired by any of the guests. A summer's day without too much sun, shady walks and bowers to stroll in, swings and roundabouts for romping parties, soft music for the sentimental, gay music for dancers, games for the active, fountains and birds and groves for the pensive, flowers for the poetical, and food for the less etherial.

Captain Brighty proposed, and was accepted by Miss Constantia without reference to her mamma's approval.

"I don't care a button," said that resolute young lady, "whether she consents or not. I'm one-and-twenty, and my own mistress, and not

going to be dictated to about my choice. So, if she makes a fuss, you know," she added, "we've only to run away, and that's the best fun after all."

"I give you my word, my adorable," replied her lover, "I think it by no means a bad plan; it saves a good deal of bore and that sort of thing, lawyers and all that, and wedding-cake—that disgusting compound of lead and sugar-plums, emblematic of the light and heavy in matrimony—ha! ha!"

"The only thing is," returned Miss Stanny, "I should like to mortify those Goldspins by a grand wedding, they *would* be so mad!"

Another proposal and acceptance took place in another green alley of the gardens—Miss Philippa Giles consented to be the bride of the young apothecary, and to share his future medical fortunes, contributing her own thereto.

But the day's amusements ended without the expected proposal from Mr. Loftus to Miss Kate, who, having done her utmost to accomplish her design on the possessor of the gardens where her flirtations were carried on, was so annoyed at failing, that she condescended, in order to spite him, to dance the Polka several times with Mr. Ben Goldspin, who, on placing her on a seat after immense exertion on his part, which had rendered

his complexion perfectly luminous, and caused drops, which might have been of sympathy, to distil from his hyacinthine locks, pronounced his partner "a trump."

Miss Clinton and Clara passed much of that day together, and improved each other's acquaintance greatly.

Clara had been received with great courtesy, on her arrival, by Mr. Loftus, and had been formally presented to him by Miss Clinton; but though he inquired after her health, and alluded to her accident, he spoke as a perfect stranger. Clara would not, however, allow the moment to pass without speaking her thanks for the hospitality he had directed to be shown her at his house.

"I am charmed," said he, with perfect coolness, "that Mrs. Wybrow was on the spot at so lucky and unlucky a moment: she is very anxious to see you, and is full of your praises; I find you create great interest in her bosom from being a friend of her son's."

So saying he bowed himself away to welcome the guests.

The new friends wandered away into the flowery recesses of the garden, great part of which was laid out quaintly in an antique style; the trees cut in formal rows with statues between,

and grotesque fountains playing in the midst of angular parterres; here and there a temple of coloured marble or a stone grotto invited to their retreats; and cool arbours and mossy cells abounded.

At length they paused in a pavilion which was placed at the end of a lake and stood in the midst of a little wild wood which quite shut out the rest of the domain. There was, close to this spot, a bit of rocky ground, which had been undisturbed and left in its original rugged beauty; a natural cascade came leaping from a high rock above and foamed over the impeding projections, dashing, at last, into the lake at its foot. A seat was placed by the side of the fall, and on a flat stone at the back Clara and Miss Clinton occupied themselves in endeavouring to decipher an inscription which was nearly effaced by the moss and wild flowers which had overgrown it.

They were both stooping over it, and Clara had removed some of the beautiful encumbrances which concealed it, when on looking up she perceived Mr. Loftus advancing towards them.

“Oh!” cried Miss Clinton, “you are arrived exactly at a moment most desired, and can explain to us the little mystery which interests amongst others in this charming place.”

“You have found out, then,” said he, “the

most retired nook of my stronghold, once my favourite haunt, but shamefully neglected of late. Since our friend, Sir Anselm," he continued, turning to Miss Clinton, "left this part of the country I have not cared to visit it. It was his hand that traced his favourite motto. See, the letters are strongly graven and can soon be made out—can you read them now, Miss Fane?"

As he spoke, he cleared away the weeds, and with a stick removed the clay from the hollowed letters. Clara stooped down and read the motto slowly—

"Trau. Schau. Wem."

But no sooner had she done so than she turned extremely pale, uttered a deep sigh, and fell fainting on the seat.

The two companions were extremely astonished, for the instant before she was full of gaiety and life, and her walk had given an unusual bloom to her cheek.

"Some insect has stung her!" exclaimed Mr. Loftus. "Good heavens! I am destined to be the cause of injury to her—Run, dear Miss Clinton! bring some water in the palm of your hand from the cascade—there!—her colour comes again. It is very singular and sudden."

He supported her as he spoke, and, untying

her bonnet, he chafed her temples, while Miss Clinton, with salts and profuse sprinkling of water, busied herself in cares to restore her. In raising her hand, Mr. Loftus observed that the tightness of a small gold bracelet she wore might retard her recovery, he unclasped it, and, as he did so, read on the clasp, to his surprise, the same motto, which was engraven on the stone—

“Trau. Schau. Wem.”

“This is extraordinary!” said he. “What an inconceivable coincidence!—merely so, of course.”

Clara opened her eyes at this moment and observed how she was attended: the blood rushed back to her cheek and forehead, which was supported on the bosom of Mr. Loftus, and, making an effort to recover herself, she exclaimed—

“Pray forgive this trouble—this weakness. I am shocked at thus disturbing the harmony of such a moment. How extraordinary!”

“What agitated you?—what caused this emotion?” asked Miss Clinton kindly.

“A singular coincidence only,” replied Clara, “a trifle—it ought not to have thus affected me. The motto on that stone, so suddenly seen, corresponds with one which so remarkably influences my life that I could not behold it without being affected. No doubt it is a common one, and, but

for circumstances, would have passed unnoticed by me. I entreat you to excuse me—I am thoroughly ashamed and quite recovered now.”

“I may then replace your bracelet,” said Mr. Loftus.

Clara blushed again as she allowed him to do so.

“I fear your secret is a painful one,” said he, “since it costs you so much agitation; those of ladies, so young as you are, in general are merely sentimental,” he added with a smile.

“It is the secret of my existence,” said Clara, mournfully, “and destined to be unexplained—alas! it is an enigma I have no hope of solving.”

“Let us abandon then the attempt to do so now,” said he offering both ladies an arm; “you shall return to the world or retire to Mrs. Wybrow’s apartments, as you see fit: she is, it seems, destined to repair my inadvertence, and will do so now if you like to employ her means again. I am too discreet to inquire further into this mystery, but I shall tremble to take you through my strange old rooms, for the walls are so scrawled with mottoes and devices that I should be afraid of scaring you at every turn. We have even a ghost legend of true love here which may make anyone shudder, particularly those who have true love sorrows to bewail.”

He said the last words in rather a sarcastic tone, which Miss Clinton observed and remarked—

“Are there no regrets nor recollections but those of love, Mr. Loftus, which may wound or startle? Life is made up of a series of sorrows, and it is but too easy to find the tender spot where chance may pierce.”

“We will positively cease to be serious,” exclaimed Mr. Loftus, suddenly, assuming an altered tone, “if it were not too presumptuous I would even entreat you both to dance and sing, but we are all too much discomposed for violent contrasts to do us good just now; we will, therefore, seek the festive board and listen to the lively strains of the lute, and, crowned with roses, laugh our cares away. And lo! we have come upon the rosary itself, where I have carefully gathered together in one blushing heap of beauty roses from every clime, of every size and variety that I could procure. Let us seat ourselves amongst them and call the cupbearers.”

They seated themselves accordingly in a beautiful bower, placed opposite a circular walk with a mound in the centre and numerous alleys diverging from it, where were planted roses in such immense profusion that the whole scene was one blaze of that most seducing of all flowers.

A table covered with refreshments had been

been placed in this retreat, and attendants were there ready to supply the guests.

“Does this remind you, Miss Fane,” said Mr. Loftus in a low voice to Clara, “of Rose Cottage and its mysteries.”

Clara started, and had not courage to reply.

“Now, my dear Miss Clinton,” said he, turning to her, “I know you are an enthusiast of Eastern lore; tell us some stories of roses. Let us make this the Feast of the Flower of a Hundred Leaves; let us pass our hours in conversing of its beauties and perfections until we imagine that the world is all one rose garden, and there is not a thorn to be found in its paths.”

“You humour my weakness well,” said Miss Clinton; “I rejoice in our having come upon this retreat as we did, and I cannot believe that you led us here by chance; but silence, the grove should be alive with melody; we have roses in abundance, but where are the nightingales?”

“Ah!” said Mr. Loftus, “there you have *my* secret. Throughout my life, however near I may approach to happiness, there is always some drawback, which almost, if not entirely, nullifies the rest. I have procured roses from every clime and possess them in perfection, but I could overcome Nature no further; I could force her to receive a flower of warmer skies into a region of the North,

but no effort of mine could attract a nightingale to my roses. Derbyshire allows us no nightingales."

"But what then is the beautiful clear note I hear, swelling so loud and melodious?" asked Miss Clinton, listening.

"Oh, that is our substitute," answered Mr. Loftus; "it is the woodlark, whose notes are here so fine as to bear a comparison with the Bird of a Thousand Songs, but the true companion of the rose is distant; yet my roses flourish as splendidly in youth and beauty without Love, and, since they cannot hope to meet him in these uncongenial regions, they pass their summer lives without."

"I never heard the voice of the nightingale in more perfection," said Miss Clinton, "than at the very place where the rose was first cultivated in France. It is really no romantic fancy on my part. I was at Provins, in Champagne, one summer, when those lovely small crimson roses, which bear the name of that favoured town, were in full bloom, and 'to them the live-long night,' and day too, there sung a whole choir of nightingales. This very rose was brought from Palestine by Count Thibault of Champagne, and planted in the gardens of his palace at Provins—the palace has disappeared in the course of ages, but

the flower still clings to the soil of its adoption, and makes the air there one atmosphere of perfume."

"Thibault, the troubadour, had, however, nothing to do with introducing the nightingales, had he?" asked Mr. Loftus, laughing.

"No," replied Miss Clinton, "but he was more judicious than some modern amateurs, and he placed his roses in a region where the bird was not necessarily banished. What is an impossibility here, followed of course there, for the soft climate agreed as well with the bird as the flower."

"That was according to the fitness of things," said Mr. Loftus, smiling, "which I was not so considerate of as the gallant lover of Queen Blanche; but though he addressed his songs to her he did not win the rose."

"She was too far above him," said Clara, who became interested and amused at this badinage, "he had placed himself rather in the position of the nightingale and the star, for which some traditions say that the ambitious bird longs, and finding it impossible to attain his wish, makes the grove re-echo with his lamentations."

"Oh, how cruel of you, Miss Fane," said Miss Clinton, "to endeavour to cast a slur on his known constancy to his rose. That must have

been some particular unfaithful nightingale, who met with his proper punishment. It is heresy to associate any other objects with these recognised lovers. The very name of this pattern of true love, in Persian unites him eternally to the flower of a hundred varied names—he is called *Gul-dum*, as she is called *Gul*. I will try to recollect some of her numerous names in that most poetical of all dialects—the enamelled language of Persia.

“ She is called *Gul-ranza*, to express her softest palest beauty and most delicate odour—then she is, in fact, a sort of Blanche of Castile—and the same word expresses a bed of full-blown roses of this kind; when she is called *Gul-i-suri*, she is Count Thibault’s Provins’ rose in scent and colour; she is *Gulzar* when she stands surrounded by a hundred blushing companions.

“ The most expressive of her lover’s notes is called *Gul-bang*; the softest he breathes to her is *Gul-e-chah*. The pleasure they both feel in each other’s society is expressed by the word *Gul-fishan*. When she is clothed with her richest and deepest colour, she becomes *Gulnar*. The first of modern poets judiciously chose this name of her for his most energetic heroine.

“ When she grows on a slender stalk, and her delicate head bends with every zephyr, she is *Gul-andam*; when she is designated *Gul-i-susan*, she

is transformed into a lily, and is a violet under the title of *Gul-na-farman*.

“When I hold a bouquet of her family in my hand, I must call her *Gul-dastah*; and the walk through allies like this where she grows, is known as *Gul-guli*.

“The rosy cheek of beauty is *Gul-zizar* and the cup of wine which has just now been presented to us we may drink as *Gul-gun*.

“Is not this a chapter of roses?”

“A fascinating catalogue,” said Mr. Loftus, “and one that should be learnt by all rose fanciers: you should be called the Bird of Breath, as the nightingale is, for singing it at length. Half the pleasure of possessing a treasure is in its associations, and the more legends and histories one can surround it with, the greater is its real value. For my own part, I prize a gallery of pictures as much for what they suggest as for what they present to the eye. It is for that reason that I prefer portraits painted by the great masters, to many other subjects of their pencil; each of these has a history attached to it, and can convey more knowledge of character, in one glance, than a whole library of descriptive biography.”

“Perhaps this explains,” said Clara, “my preference of painting to sculpture; in general, the subjects of sculpture are classical, and even in fine

busts, the absence of colour, and consequent expression causes the soul to seem wanting. Statues are like shadows, exact outlines, but with none of the animation of life."

"There are exceptions," said Loftus, "which you will acknowledge when you have been in Italy. Yet I agree with you in a general way. When one has seen the immortal portrait of Ariosto at Venice, one knows the poet."

"And when one has looked on the bust of the despairing Clytiæ, one knows her history," observed Miss Clinton. "This is like the dispute of day and night, both are glorious in their turn; and neither has a right to take the palm from his charming rival."

"My friend, Sir Anselm Fairfax," said Loftus, turning to Miss Clinton, "would be happy to convince Miss Fane of her heresy, with regard to sculpture; it is his passion above all others: he has, at his villa on Lake Como, a gallery where the most sceptical would be converted; he is far from excluding modern art, as every sculptor in Italy and Germany can testify. He says, justly, that modern art does not develope itself so forcibly by means of the pencil as the chisel, and he considers that the latter has the start by a century; some few, indeed, have trodden very closely on the

heels of the first and heaven-inspired creations of the Venus and the Apollo."

"Have you seen the Walhalla on the Danube?" asked Miss Clinton.

"The moment it was finished I saw it," replied Loftus, "and a marvel it is in its way, stupendous and startling; the exterior is faultless with Schwanthaler's magnificent bas-reliefs, its position is unrivalled, crowning a bold mountain on the banks of the finest river in Europe, but the interminable maze of steps leading up to it weakens its effect; the enormous mass of stone which they necessarily employ, is too intrusive; nothing can give grace to such a pile; the very fatigue it suggests destroys harmony. There was no necessity for apparent approach that way, a covered way would have answered better, winding round the hill or under it. It is sufficient, that a broad carriage road leads to the back of the temple. It is not a shrine for some miraculous Madonna, that it should require a line of steps and stations before it can be reached; the mere aspect of being unattainable would give it greater sublimity.

"The whole thing is like the monarch's mind who planned it—a mixture of greatness and puerility—of grandeur and vulgarity; he has

built a perfect temple, and spoilt it by an overwhelming staircase; he has designed a retreat for demi-gods and intended to place genius on its proper pedestal, but he was stopped short by a twinge of conscience instigated by bigotry, and left out some of the most glorious names in the history of his country. He has raised altars to the virtues and the talents, and put coarsely painted Bayadères amongst their solemn groups; he has erected walls and roofs of the purest marble, and daubed them over with colour and gilding. Although," he added, laughing, "some say, the ancients did the same—so he may be right.

"Still, with all its defects, the Walhalla is one of the finest monuments in Europe, and worth a journey to behold."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed a voice, easily recognised as Lady Brixton's, "if they are not here! Why, Mr. Loftus, my Kate and I have been puffing and blowing all over the gardens to find you. What could have made you hide yourself in this corner?—everybody thinks you have set off by the train to London, and left us in the lurch."

"I deserve your reproach, my dear Lady Brixton," said Mr. Loftus, "we were, however,

on our way to join you—let me give you bouquets, at least, of my roses, which, in your way, you resemble; here is *gulnar* the crimson for you, and *gul-zizar* the glowing for Miss Kate; you see, Miss Clinton, what an apt scholar I am.”

Miss Kate accepted his rose in spite of her pouting.

“I thought I had tired you out with that last polka,” said she, “you fine dandies are so soon done up. I could dance all to-day and all night too, and be ready for another ball to-morrow.”

“Happy state!” said Mr. Loftus, with pretended enthusiasm, “delicious feeling of healthful vigour! how superior to the supine crowd of fashionable nonentities, who breathe only the atmosphere of gas, and dread the breeze of early morning. Shall we go and swing? Miss Fane,” said he, with an affectation of earnest, “do come, it’s such fun!”

“Yes,” cried Miss Kate, “I’ve been in two or three times, as high as the top of the cedars pretty near; that bear, Ben Goldspin, canted me up such a height! I’ll be even with him though, if once I get him in.”

Mr. Loftus, giving his arm to the new comers,

and followed by the other two, accordingly proceeded to a very different scene of action, and sentiment, art and the roses were soon driven from the minds of all.

CHAPTER XVI.

'Tis far off,
And rather like a dream than an assurance,
That my remembrance warrants.

Tempest.

BEFORE Clara parted from Miss Clinton that day, the latter exacted from her a promise to pass the chief part of the Midsummer holidays with her, at Coombe Park.

“Since your intention was not to return to your friends at Llangollen, at present,” said she, “there is no reason why you should not indulge me with the only society I have ever found congenial in my solitude; I will not prevent you, if you desire it, going to London afterwards, as you do not wish to return to Mrs. Trumble’s, where I cannot but think your talents are wasted. If we do not hear of some position more suitable to you, you shall be at liberty to seek your own fortunes in your own way, meantime, allow us for

the present, to interfere with your plans by substituting our own."

Clara was too grateful for this friendly offer to decline it, and was not sorry, when all the bustle of breaking up had taken place, to find herself transferred to Coombe Park and installed in a tower chamber, with books, instruments, and drawings, in profusion round her.

She found her welcome from Lady Derrington as cordial as from her daughter, and soon saw so much in her character to admire that her heart became penetrated with joy and gratitude, at the kindness which appeared awaiting her wherever she moved.

"I am certainly fortunate," she said within herself, "in thus meeting with unexpected friends; dear nurse, Susey, fostered my helpless infancy, my beloved Mrs. Fowler and her good sister protected my youth, I was happy with the Petits, I was even not unhappy at Mrs. Trumble's, although the habits there were uncongenial to me; and now I find, by chance, true warm affectionate friends. Whatever the misfortunes of my parents might have been, which, alas! I shall probably never know, they seem averted from me. But that Providence watches over all his works, I should think myself a special instance of his saving care."

Lady Derrington's sole occupation in life, seemed to be to minister to the good of others; as she often sat musing by the fire, or seated in an arm-chair in the recess of her window, either in winter or summer, she would occasionally start up with a recollection of some benevolent idea which she hastened to see executed. Her scissors and fingers were always employed in cutting out linen or flannel into shapes for the poor; her mind always devising schemes for the benefit of her neighbours; nor was it merely of their wants she thought; she delighted in their pleasures and enjoyments, and was fond of inventing for her numerous humble friends little surprises and pleasant occasions for hilarity, such as are usually confined by fashionable friends to each other on *jours de l'an, fêtes* and other memorable epochs.

The birthday of a tenant's child was recollected by her as an opportunity of sending some useful present—the opening of spring, the height of summer, the close of autumn, the arrival of winter—all seasons were festive with her, for she made them so to everyone within her reach. No sooner had she disposed of one set of presents and souvenirs than she prepared herself for others; her catalogue of friends and neighbours was interminable, and each seemed to have a claim on her care, the sick, the ailing, the infirm, came

into her list with the young, the lively, the gay and the grave. She had something suitable for all and she forgot no one.

It is not surprising, that Lady Derrington was beloved, yet she was by no means rich ; indeed, for their rank, the family was considered the reverse ; all their fortune was, however, spent amongst their tenantry, as they afforded themselves no house in town and never gave expensive entertainments. Miss Clinton was their only surviving child, a large family, which they once possessed, having reduced itself to this one, on whom all their affections were centered ; the loss of their last son, at the age of twenty, about ten years before, had so painfully affected Lord Derrington, that he had never entirely recovered the shock and was subject to fits of melancholy abstraction, which explained the grave appearance which caused him to be looked upon by a stranger as a proud man.

The same cause had operated on his daughter, the youthful buoyancy of whose spirits had given way to a sadness seldom overcome, and favoured by the secluded and studious life she led.

In consequence of the untimely death of the heir, the title and estates of Lord Derrington would devolve on a distant branch, of which Mr. Loftus was the representative, and if a wish found its way into the hearts of the parents, disappointed

in all their aspirations as they had been, it was that a union should take place between their daughter and Edmond Loftus. He was, however, several years younger than Miss Clinton, and there seemed but little likelihood of the event occurring.

Still there was no one in whose society Mr. Loftus took so much pleasure as that of Miss Clinton, and he had accustomed himself to consult her and confide in her as in a sister. Whether it was as safe for her affections as for his own to encourage this kind of intimacy remained to be decided, but, at all events, it did not occur to him that any nearer relation could subsist between them than that of the Platonic friendship, in which he was a sincere believer, following the doctrine of his intimate friend and master in philosophy, Sir Anselm Fairfax, whose estates joined his own, and who, though like himself rarely in the country, was his frequent companion in other parts of the kingdom, as well as abroad.

Isabella Clinton was a person of no ordinary character; added to a noble generous disposition, alive to every delicacy of feeling and sentiment, she possessed taste, and genius, and learning, such as seldom fall to the share of her sex. She was a poet in the true sense of the word, and her judgment was as pure as her compositions. She

believed so far in "the invariable principles of poetry" as to reject that which is common and vulgar in expression, and understood true poetry to be the most refined thought clothed in the most refined language.

There is, doubtless, a poetry, like a painting and a music, which is formed for and understood by the masses, and the merits of which are not felt by minds more highly cultivated, and who are as little able to admire the favourites of the crowd as the latter are of appreciating in a general way the idols which they worship.

If it were not so, how comes it that reputations are attained by persons who gain the most enthusiastic votaries, amongst whom glide occasionally some few of higher judgment, while their writings, to souls nurtured on the more ethereal food, appear altogether insipid, prosiac, flat, and colourless.

The vulgar and uneducated, or, what is worse, the half-educated, who are altogether ignorant of, or have not pursued, the divine inspirations of the mighty masters of song, charmed at that which is merely a far-off echo of their melody, are content to take it for the original strain, and, having once adopted this belief, they cannot recognise in the true the merit which they have already accorded to the false, and even go so far as to prefer the tinsel they have believed to be gold to gold itself.

Still, however mortifying it may be to a sensitive mind to see the triumph of mediocrity over genius, there is a consolation in the truth expressed by the Eastern poem—

“Though a piece of glass be worn on the head and a jewel be trodden under foot, yet, at the time of buying and selling, glass is glass and gems are gems.”

There has always existed a crowd of bad poets—the more numerous in the interregnum of great ones—who are at once scattered, like a swarm of fire-flies, by the bursting forth of a great luminary; but since the insects, insignificant as they are, have yet a certain beauty of their own capable of pleasing a little circle, it is as well that they should sport their brief day, delighting those eyes which would be blinded by the rays of the sun.

It would have seemed natural that Isabella Clinton and Edmond Loftus should have entered so much into each other's tastes and feelings that their union would have been an event probable in spite of the slight disparity of age, which was not very apparent. But “that which is possible never happens,” and the stars that ruled their destiny seemed to have decreed the contrary.

Certain it is Loftus from the time of the *dejeuner* in his gardens had been unable to think of anything but his ideal, and that ideal had

shaped itself into one form, which was continually intruding. His intended journey was put off from day to day, and Mrs. Wybrow was agreeably surprised to find that he lingered on, and, at last, ceased to name his intention of leaving, instead of which he was accustomed to order his horse and take long rides about the country, frequently not returning till late at night.

His rides had generally the same end in view, and scarcely a day passed that he was not descending the rocky road which conducted to Coombe Place.

He did not always enter the gates, but he would wander about the neighbourhood, take long excursions over the neighbouring moors, and sometimes, leaving his horse at some farm, he would roam for hours in the high woods, losing himself amongst the Druid stones that crown the heights and lie scattered on the hills for miles.

He had one day reached an eminence, and had paused in a thickly-wooded nook on a high rock which overlooked the surrounding country that lay far below outspread at his feet disclosing the meanders of a winding river, which flowed through meadows enamelled with flowers, interrupted here and there by thatch-roofed hamlets, the blue smoke of which went curling up amongst the clustered trees.

The rock that rose behind him was huge and black, and was hollowed out at the base in the form of a seat, which tradition ascribed as the resting-place of the Druid priests ; there were steps cut on the face of the rock to some height, and when the highest point was reached a hollow appeared, where it was supposed Pagan sacrifices took place.

He had seated himself on the very edge of the overhanging cliff, and was reclining amongst the thick underwood, entirely hidden from view, when the sound of voices caused him to bury himself still deeper in the shadowing boughs, in hopes of escaping the observation of some idler, when the words he heard convinced him not only that no mere commonplace stroller had intruded on his solitude, but that the object of his reveries was herself in his vicinity.

Miss Clinton and Miss Fane had approached close to the spot where he lay, and had seated themselves in the recess of the rock called the Druid's Chair.

“ You tell me a curious romance,” said Miss Clinton, continuing a conversation, “ and I am indeed flattered and charmed at the confidence you repose in me. But has nothing ever led you to conjecture who your parents might be, and is this motto the only clue to the mystery which you possess ?”

“ I have no other,” said Clara, “ and all the ingenuity of Susey Love, my nurse, and my own combined could arrive at no solution. At so populous a place as Liverpool she thought that some circumstances connected with the event might be discovered, but she waited in vain. The facts were stated by her husband at the time to the Mayor of Liverpool, who had them put in writing, and who even advertised, describing the facts, but no notice was ever taken. Nurse Susey’s husband has continued to make long voyages ever since, and he always had a romantic sailor-notion that he should clear up the mystery, but he returned over and over again, and had gained no information, which, indeed, was not to be expected on the high seas. When I was about six years old, he met with a sad misfortune in the loss of the little vessel he commanded, everything went ill with him, and, from a state of comparative comfort, he was reduced to great necessity; he was, at this time, obliged to sell his small house and furniture, and take service in a merchant ship, while poor Nurse Susey sought a place in a menial capacity.

“ Good fortune led her to Llangollen, where she was recommended by a person known to Mrs. Fowler, and as she would not part with me, whom she considered as her own child, I was allowed to

remain in the house. Mrs. Fowler, who was a widow and childless, took a fancy to me, and, by degrees, became very much attached to me. Her sister, who has been an invalid from her birth, was amused at my childish ways, and, in the end, I became almost necessary to them.

“ In the course of a few years Love returned from sea, having been very fortunate and having saved money enough to re-establish his wife at Liverpool and to purchase a vessel with which he could trade as before. Susey intended to take me back with her, but my new protectresses represented to her so forcibly the advantage it would be to me to receive from them the education they desired to give me, that her anxiety for my welfare overcame her wish to have me with her, and I was accordingly left in the care of those tender friends, who have ever since protected me. I often saw dear Nurse Susey, who is living happily at Liverpool, and her husband continues to succeed in every voyage he takes.

“ Two years ago Mrs. Fowler sent me to Paris in the charge of an old friend of hers, who had married a French professor of languages, and who has a school at Passy. There I found new friends in Madame Petit and her daughter Eugenie, who has since married her cousin, a young jeweller in Paris. I remained with them in order

to carry on my studies, and had great advantages there. Mrs. Fowler came to fetch me and we returned together to England. I have already related to you the rest of my adventures, and perhaps fate has more in store for me yet."

"The rest of her adventures!" thought Edmond Loftus, "has she named the episode of Rose Cottage, and the part I have had in the romance of her life?"

This question he asked himself uneasily, and became extremely uncomfortable in the idea of having unwittingly heard already so much. In order to avoid betraying himself, he softly rose from his bed of leaves and let himself slip forward over the rock, clinging to the climbing branches till he could leap to a projection below, which having done, he had only to descend by a winding path in the wood, and, instead of arriving at the Druid's Chair, he found himself several hundred feet below, near the borders of the winding river, where he seated himself and fell into a new train of reflection.

"There is a mystery hangs over this strange girl," thought he, "which perplexes me. Is she really what she seems? Every day the papers teem with histories of adventuresses, who assume the most respectable and seductive forms, and, after having gained friends and advantages, are

discovered to be impostors. What madness leads me towards this girl? she does not seem to seek me, yet she will fall into my path. I was startled at her apparition in my masquerading visit in Poland Street with Wybrow; she then plants herself in my own neighbourhood—perhaps by design—who can tell? Yet she certainly discouraged me sufficiently, but then I appeared to her a poor artist or a nameless adventurer. Her manner is changed to me since, and I cannot avoid treating her with respect and deference. Isabella has been fascinated with her, as I was, and places full reliance on her stories; what has she told? Would that I had heard the rest; it was, no doubt, a notable mystery!”

He continued thus to torment himself for some time, and at length rose, and returning to the farm-house, reclaimed his horse, and slowly took his way back to Loftus Hall.

Clara, in relating her story to Miss Clinton, had not named him. She considered that, in return for the offered friendship of her new and disinterested friend, she was bound to make her aware of the position she held in society, but she did not think it necessary to enter into details which might have a disagreeable effect on the hearer, might prejudice her against another, and, as concerned herself, revive recollections of an

event now passed away together with the other actors, for she concluded that it was extremely unlikely she should ever meet with any of the inmates of Rose Cottage again. She wished to dwell on her visit there as little as possible for the repose of her own mind, as the hints thrown out by Mr. Loftus respecting the character of Mrs. Frillet rendered her recollections of that otherwise pleasant episode jarring to the harmony of her feelings.

“ I cannot,” she reflected, “ think ill of Mr. Loftus now that I know him in his proper capacity, and ought not to name the caprice which induced him to submit to this absurd disguise ; it was probably merely for an idle amusement and had no deeper motive. He would not now, I am certain, hazard such a step again with regard to me ; his manner is changed, and he gives me the effect of being vexed at what has passed. It is better to forget it and let the affair fade away altogether.”

Clara reasoned thus, acting on the suggestion of her own pure mind, not suspecting herself to be the object of either curiosity or envy to any one, and quite unconscious of the heart-burning and universal commotion she had caused in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XVII.

This touches me in reputation.

Comedy of Errors.

IT would seem that a host with the very best intentions generally fails to give satisfaction to all his guests at a party. He is too attentive to some or too little so to others; he shows a preference and causes jealousies; he seeks to please all and annoys many; and, by way of reward for the trouble he has given himself, he is usually abused behind his back, and voted to possess every evil quality under the sun because he has failed to fulfil all the expectations the lively fancies of his guests had indulged in.

In the Brixton family there was considerable excitement when the Lady-mother related to her daughters the fact of her having, in a conversation with Mrs. Trumble, discovered that Clara was in so humble a capacity as a teacher.

“Upon my word,” she remarked, “it’s like the impudence of some people inviting who they please to other people’s houses, and to meet other people as good as themselves. I suppose Mrs. Goldspin took that upon her, for I decided against the whole lot at the School from the first, and she must have done it to spite me, I suppose, but I’ll manage to be even with her somehow.”

“Would you believe it too!” cried Miss Kate, “that Mr. Loftus was more attentive to that girl than to any one there. There she was, hanging on his arm, with her hands full of roses, which he had given her, and I saw him looking at her, and watching her like a cat, all the time. He seemed as if he saw nothing but her: for my part I see nothing, at all events, to admire in such a pale die-away-looking chit as that. As for Loftus, after all he *has* said to me, one way and another, I think his conduct shameful.”

“You couldn’t have played your cards well, Kitty,” said her mother; “I got you a good opportunity, and you had time enough for flirting and bringing him round, and you don’t seem to have made any way.”

“Why, what would you have me do?” cried her daughter, snappishly; “I couldn’t ask *him*, could I? though I did pretty near it. He’s as

stupid as a clod, or he'd have seen fast enough what I was aiming at."

"Perhaps he saw too clear," observed Miss Constantia; "men don't like forwardness, and I, for one, never thought Loftus was in love with you at all."

"What do you mean, Miss, by that?" cried her sister, passionately; "he's as much in love with me as your fine Captain is with you. I'm sure it's quite a scandal your going about as you do with him. Ben Goldspin says it the laugh of the county, and that Captain Brighty is nothing but an old carpenter's son, with all his brag of lords and ladies."

"What does Ben Goldspin know of my affairs?" exclaimed Miss Stanny, colouring very red; "and what right has such a cub as he to name me at all. If you think him good enough to dance and flirt with, as you do, I don't."

"I'll tell you what, girls," interposed their mamma, "I'll put an end to all this quarrelling at once. Its clear that Kate's chance is a poor one, and, if it's true that the Captain's family is beneath us, one is as little likely to go off as the other, for I'll not encourage that dandy officer any more, and as for Loftus you must give him up, Kate, and set your cap at some one else."

“ Ben Goldspin, perhaps !” observed Miss Stanny, sneering.

He’s better than a carpenter’s heir,” retorted her sister.

“ The captain is no such thing,” said Miss Stanny, in a fury, “ and, if he is, he did more than your fine squire, for he proposed to me at the breakfast, and, what’s more, I accepted him : so there now.”

“ Indeed,” said Lady Brixton ; “ did you ! and without waiting for my consent.”

“ What was the good of it,” replied Miss Stanny ; “ you knew all along he was courting me, and you never said I was not to accept him : so I’ve done it, and, as I’m of age, I mean to stand to the bargain.”

“ Really, Miss, you are a very decided young lady,” said her mother, “ but perhaps you may change your tone, or your Captain may, when I tell you that, *without* my consent, you haven’t a shilling, of age or not. The money is left to me to do as I please with, and I can, if I like, throw it into the streets if you don’t happen to please me, and who will may pick it up.”

Miss Stanny and Miss Kate both stared at this piece of intelligence, and it went a great way towards cooling the impetuosity of their feelings ; they subsided, therefore, into sulkiness, and when

the hour came for their usual ride neither of the young ladies was in the happiest of moods.

“And so,” began Miss Stanny, to her lover, the Captain, who was her companion on the way, “you have been telling me fine stories all this time about your family—your cousin, Sir John Flarum, and your cousin, Lady Dubberley; I wonder how you dare to look me in the face.”

“What ails my adored angel!” exclaimed the Captain, who had been favoured with this remark, the first he had obtained during their ride in spite of his flatteries and fine speeches; “what have my cousins done to incur your anger; what have I done? I give you my word—I am thunderstruck, annihilated by these frowns—explain! explain! Is this the tone suitable to our revealed affection?”

“Revealed fiddlestick!” cried Miss Stanny; “there’s more revealed than perhaps you’ll like, if all’s true that Ben Goldspin has been saying.”

The Captain’s eyes flashed and he grasped his whip somewhat tighter in his hand, as he asked rather seriously—

“Miss Brixton, what am I to understand by this; has any one dared to make free with my affairs?”

“To be sure they have,” said Miss Stanny; “you went on bragging to me about your grand

relations, and I repeated what you said to make the Goldspins mad, and now it turns out that you are only a tradesman's son after all. It's enough to put one out."

Captain Brighty's check became the colour of crimson in a moment and then turned very pale.

"And it's to Mr. Ben Goldspin that I am indebted for this communication, so politely transferred to me? I give you my word he shall repent it."

And, as the gallant officer spoke, he looked as if he was by no means feigning.

"There's no use getting into a passion," said Constantia, cooling as her lover became irritated; "you'd no business to deceive me and let me go and make myself ridiculous. Why did you pass yourself off for a great man, and make me think, if I married you, I might be cousin to a duchess. It was too bad."

"My sweet Stanny," said Captain Brighty, sneeringly, "you are deceived—but not by me. My relatives, I give you my word," are what I represented; they stand on an equal footing with the late Lord Mayor Brixton."

"That's nothing to do with it," said Miss Stanny, biting her lip; "you never spoke of trade, and you know I hate tradespeople, and I wouldn't forgive the best man in England who told me a

parcel of rigmaroles about great people that are nobodies. I dare say you wouldn't like to hear that I haven't got a shilling to help myself, and all through you."

"Like to hear it," exclaimed Captain Brighty, sensibly touched; "why, my adorable, what do you mean?"

"That mamma says if I don't marry a gentleman, she isn't obliged to give me my fortune," returned Miss Stanny; "and if I marry to displease her there's an end of my expectations."

"Oh!" said the captain, drawing a long breath, "that's the way the land lies, is it?—but if she gives her consent it makes all the difference!"

"To be sure," replied Miss Stanny, "so you see our plan of running away is no good. I've as much right as she has to be in a rage, and I don't know, but what I shan't be friends with you again, and give you up at once."

"Oh, my enchantress," said the captain, coolly, "you are cruelly unjust, but you could not act so falsely. If I never named to you the profession of my honoured papa, it was that I really did not think myself bound to bore you with my birth and parentage. My cousin, Lady Dubberly, is at this moment the most fashionable woman in Belgravia, she is married to one of the first baronets in the kingdom; and as for Sir

John Flarum, his title is a reward for faithful services to government in trying times. My dear papa is retired from the business that occupied his leisure hours, and is now an M.P. for his county. I fancy, therefore, that the *mésalliance* would not be so great as it appeared at first to you and your aristocratic mamma; but, as my papa, I give you my word, would not like a daughter-in-law without money, I should not wonder if I were obliged, my sweet beloved, to cut the connexion after all."

Miss Stanny started.

"Don't be ridiculous," said she, rather tremulously, but endeavouring to appear indifferent, "I see you can't take a joke—I didn't mean to say that I should give you up—and as for mamma, you have only to make your court to her and we'll see what can be done."

"Now, Stanny," said the captain, approaching his horse very near her's, "let us understand each other. I did not say anything about my birth; because I did not think the house of Brixton so very illustrious as to require that I should be over candid. My old dad is a capital fellow in his way, but he likes money and does not allow me over much, if I marry a woman with fortune it will be all right with him and he'll double our income. I'm his eldest son, and he sent me into the army

at my persuasion, but he has winced ever since at the expense and he's growing old and stingy and wou't stand much more; I have two other brothers, and one is in—" the captain gulped, but continued, "in the business, and, if I displease him, I have but a poor chance. Now, if you really care for me, as you have professed, you will not give me up because of the paltry chatter of a puppy—whom I mean to chastise—and you will exert the good sense I imagine you have, I will do all I can to gain over my lady, and we shall be married after all. But, Stanny, observe me—I am not so much in love as to put up with insult from any one, male or female, and say but the word that you prefer looking after a better match, and I give you back your promise; when this ride is over I quit you, and I give you my word, I shall not seek you again."

Miss Stanny looked at her lover, and saw in his countenance a confirmation of his words; he had never appeared handsomer in her eyes and there was a vague purpose which she guessed, as she watched his countenance, that convinced her that he would do something which would cover her with *éclat*.

"I will not lose him," she thought, "to give the Goldspin's a triumph and let Kate crow over me."

“What a temper you are, to be sure,” said she, “I never wanted to quarrel, I only just told you what Ben Goldspin said, and you fly out in this way as if I meant to give you up. I’m sure I—”

Here she found her emotion too strong for her voice, and the captain, thoroughly softened, had now only to utter a variety of pleasing nothings, protestations, &c., until at the end of their ride they parted better friends than before.

A few days after, Lady Brixton received by rail, a large packing case containing some choice flowers and fruit of the most surpassing beauty, from an unknown friend, and on casually naming the fact in the morning, when Captain Brighty rode over to pay her a visit, before there had been time to deny him his privilege, he remarked indifferently—

“I give you my word, my lady, I should not be at all surprised if my old dad had stripped his conservatory for you; he has heard so much of you from me of late that he wishes to show his respects to the friend of his son.”

“Do you mean to say, captain,” said Lady Brixton, “that these things came from your father?”

“I give you my word, my lady,” returned the officer, “that they can come from no other

quarter, the old gentleman is very sly, deuced gallant, and from my soul, I feel a little uneasy; he is a widower for the third time and near eighty, but he is easily moved with the report of beauty, and I have sent such flaming accounts of you to him that he is capable of ——, 'pon my soul—I wouldn't answer for his popping the question in one of the flower buds!"

Lady Brixton laughed.

"An old woman like me!" said she, "with two great tall daughters, a likely matter!"

"Likely enough, by Jove!" returned he, "you are just the sort of woman he admires and he has an odd fancy, though of an old Norman family himself, came over with the conqueror—we bear a spur in our shield presented on the spot by William, when my ancestor gave his horse to the Duke at the moment that his steed was killed under him—my father has an odd notion that there is no true nobility out of the city of London, and, says he—the Brixtons have always been city people and do honour to the county. Did I ever tell you, how he became engaged in trade, ha! ha! strange enough, as I often say to my cousin, Lady Dubberly, whose husband is one of the oldest baronets in England, strange enough how our uncle's father's brother happened to take up trade in the city. He was a cavalier of

Charles's, and persecuted for his attachment to the monarch, it was in the time of old Noll, and, pursued by his enemies, he took refuge on London-bridge in a carpenter's shop, he begged to be concealed and the good old tradesman consented to hide him. The next day, there was a high wind; the carpenter's pretty daughter was hanging her neck out at the little window to look at a procession on the river, the wind took her at the moment that she had leant too far, and unable to regain her balance, over she went into the water. Our ancestor, Sir Wildebrand St. Bride, from which Brighty is a corruption, at that instant was looking out at the window above, had observed her, for he had an eye to beauty, and the moment she fell, regardless of all but her danger, out he was in a twinkling after her, and caught her clothes just as she was sinking, a boat took them to shore, he restored the daughter to her father who, taking out a heavy purse from a cabinet in his workshop, exclaimed—'Bravo cavalier! I give you my daughter and this purse, as an earnest of all the rest which fills this cabinet. Marry her, but on this condition, never be above my trade, which has gained me all this wealth, and let your children's children belong to the Carpenters' Company from this time forth.'

“We kept the word given till the present day,

for my father himself dabbled in that style of thing. You have heard of the Chevalier Errard? Well, a man of noble family like him did not disdain to improve the melody of England; he made harps; my father made pianofortes. He made besides a large fortune, on which he retired, and, as for me—the tradition finishes with me—I have no taste for carpenter's work further than that my sword will make for me 'in th' eminent deadly breach,' as Cuthbert of our's says in the play when he acts Othello."

Lady Brixton had not a word in reply to this well-timed tirade, and, though she had resolved to give the Captain his *congé* the very first time he visited her again, she could not find it in her heart to be harsh to the descendant of an old Norman family, and one whose papa was so great an admirer of beauty and had so judicious a respect for the dignity of true city families. The consequence was that Captain Brighty, whom she ever afterwards called St. Bride, was received on the usual footing, and all recollections of the family quarrel on his account, was buried in oblivion.

Whether the descendant of William the Conqueror's Knight of the Spur forgot the causes of it so easily will be hereafter known.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny.

Hamlet.

MRS. GOLDSPIN was sitting in state to receive visitors according to her wont about the same time as this incident occurred in the Brixton family, and was fuming at some recollection which disturbed the equinamity of her temper, when Lady Brixton was announced.

This visit was a very rare occurrence, and would not have taken place now but for form's sake after their association at Mr. Loftus's party. Their conversation, though apparently friendly, betrayed the secret jealousies of either party, which peeped out occasionally, whenever an opportunity occurred.

“Well, on the whole,” said Mrs. Goldspin, “the party at Loftus Hall went off pretty well,

though, really I must say, that I think the marked way in which your daughter Kate was neglected must have rather put you out—at least it did me, for I am really so fond of her—she looked so well, too, in her pink: how pink does become your family! some complexions it will, and you having all high colours, it softens them down so; though some people think it unbecoming, and I heard Mr. Loftus say it was a colour he didn't like. I think that poor Miss Fane was dressed in white; wasn't she?"

"I'm sure I never looked at her," said Lady Brixton; "I really can't think how such a person happened to be there. I must say, I'm surprised that I wasn't consulted before she was invited."

"Why, my dear Lady Brixton," said Mrs. Goldspin, "it was your own invitation; I had no hand in it, I vow."

"I!" screamed Lady Brixton; "why, I never knew scarcely of her existence, and when I saw her there, says I to Kate, 'oh, I suppose it's a poor relation of Mrs. Goldspin's, and she's got her invited.'"

"Well, that *is* good," retorted Mrs. Goldspin; "when I never had such an idea, and should less if I had known all I know of her now. A person of *that description* to be admitted into the sphere in which I move is really too bad."

“What is she then?” asked Lady Brixton; her hope of hearing a little scandal overcoming her anger.

“It’s a very mysterious affair, indeed,” said Mrs. Goldspin: “this Miss Fane is some old flame of Mr. Loftus’s, whom he has brought here, and palmed off upon us in the country as a respectable person in order to conceal his connexion with her. My maid happens to be the cousin of a young girl who is a parlour boarder at Mrs. Trumble’s, and she found out that this dissolute young man has been visiting this wicked young woman disguised as an artist, and she has received him, unknown to Mrs. Trumble; going out to take walks with him by moonlight, climbing over the garden wall, and playing on the flute, and meeting him at the Well-flowering, and pretending to be hurt to get taken to his house. Oh! such a scene of wickedness! it’s enough to make one’s hair stand on end. I shall make it my business to call at Mrs. Trumble’s and tell her what has been going on in her school, and recommend her to get rid of her teacher as soon as she can.”

“Bless my heart,” said Lady Brixton, “how glad I am to have discovered this; how fortunate that my Kate refused Mr. Loftus the other day at the breakfast. Law! she has such a sensitive

mind ; she never could have stood this news if she had consented to be his wife ; but, somehow, she never liked him. ‘Ma,’ she would say to me, ‘there’s something in his face that doesn’t suit me ; he isn’t the man for my money.’”

“ I should think not,” replied Mrs. Goldspin, “ but, as Ben says, girls often deceive themselves if one pays them a bit of attention which means nothing. However, she’s had a narrow escape : men are really not to be trusted now-a-days. What a shocking thing about the Captain !”

“ What about him ?” said Lady Brixton.

“ Why, his turning out an impostor, you know,” said Mrs. Goldspin, “ and being only a carpenter’s son. I feel for Miss Constantia, and I know how to appreciate a mother’s vexations.”

“ I dare say you have cause,” retorted Lady Brixton, “ but in this case, I have only to tell you as a friend that the less you speak on the subject of the Captain the better, or it may be the worse for other folks who shall be nameless. It’s been traced to certain people, this stupid report, and will only do the inventor harm, and serve the object of his spite. My daughter is to be married to the Captain soon, who is the descendant of an old Norman knight of William the Conqueror’s time, and who will take his ancient name of St. Bride when he enters our family. As for carpen-

tering, it's all a farce: old Mr. Brighty, being fond of music, amused himself with a great wholesale pianoforte warehouse, which happened to turn out lucrative, but he got tired of it, and is now an M.P. I will thank you, Ma'am, to mention this where it may be useful, as a gentle hint thrown out—if you should happen to know the author of the report—that he should disappear a short time, if he would escape a horsewhipping, might not be misplaced.”

So saying Lady Brixton rose and took her leave, while Mrs. Goldspin, a little startled at her threat, remained to retail to all her visitors the history of the delinquency of the unconscious Clara.

The information, such as it was, was derived from an excellent source—the recounter being no other than Charlotte, who was passing a week with her cousin during the holidays, and who, having made it a point to listen at the door when the supposed Mr. Clark sought his sittings of Clara, had been a witness of the last scene between them. As, however, she did not dare to confess the precise method she had adopted to arrive at this knowledge, she gave out to her cousin that she possessed the faculty of clairvoyance in so remarkable a degree that she was able to discover the most hidden secrets, and the

catalogue of disclosures she poured into the ear of her credulous auditor was so astonishing that her reputation as a sonnambulist was at once established. Mrs. Goldspin's curiosity was roused, and the revelation made to her, besides a variety of other matter connected with her neighbours' affairs, quite edified that lady.

As extreme respectability was the great ambition of Mrs. Goldspin, she lost no time in driving to Mrs. Trumble's, who astonished at the unusual honour paid her by her proud neighbour, whose bow at church was supposed to confer on her a special favour, was put quite in a bustle and entered her best parlour where the great lady was already seated, with her complexion a good deal heightened and her nasal organ considerably agitated.

"Mrs. Trumble," began Mrs. Goldspin, solemnly, after a few words of dignified greeting had passed, "I am not, I believe, mistaken in thinking that the young person who accompanied you to Loftus Hall on a late occasion is a teacher in your school?"

"Certainly, ma'am," replied the lady interrogated; "Miss Fane I suppose you mean?"

"I do," returned Mrs. Goldspin; "before you admitted her into your family I presume you were

acquainted with her history and connexions, and were quite satisfied of her respectability?"

"Doubtless, ma'am," said Mrs. Trumble, hesitating, "that is I engaged her from an advertisement, and was quite satisfied before I took her."

"Oh, an advertisement, ma'am," returned Mrs. Goldspin; "let me tell you that that is a very unsatisfactory method—any one may advertise and represent themselves as they please. Were you aware of her previous acquaintance with Mr. Loftus—her coming here as a blind, and her receiving him in a disguise?"

"Lord bless me, ma'am, no," cried Mrs. Trumble; "she never knew him before she came here. She told me so."

"She told you probably much that you believe, which I confess surprises me in a woman of your age," said Mrs. Goldspin; "did you never suspect that Clark, the artist, and Mr. Loftus were one and the same?"

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Mrs. Trumble; "what a fool I've been!—never to have seen through it all. It comes upon me like lightning now—to be sure! and Clark gone off, and Miss with all her fine lady airs—she was always fit, I said, only to be put under a glass case to be looked at! Well, how *did* you find at all out, ma'am?"

“I am not at liberty to inform you,” replied Mrs. Goldspin; “you have been very incautious, and I hope this will be a warning to you another time. You must get rid of this young woman or your school will soon suffer. I am sorry to find Mr. Loftus has so disgraced himself and offered such an insult to persons of family in his neighbourhood. Being at the head of the aristocracy in this part of the world, you know, I feel it my duty if I observe anything wrong to set it right. Where is the benighted young person now?”

“She is on a visit with Miss Clinton for the holidays. Law! how shocked she will be when she knows it,” said Mrs. Trumble.

“I shall think it my duty then to inform Lady Derrington immediately,” said Mrs. Goldspin, with an important air, “of the fact that she has admitted a *person of that description* beneath her roof.”

So saying she rose, and taking leave of Mrs. Trumble, who was full of regrets and apologies that such an event should have happened in her house, returned to her carriage, after giving orders to her coachman to drive to Coombe Place.

Mrs. Trumble had to devour her vexation alone, for Miss Giles was absent on a visit for the holidays, leaving her in possession. As her union with the apothecary was not fixed to occur till the

year following, Mrs. Trumble was particularly annoyed that their domestic arrangements should be deranged before that time. Clara's services were very valuable to her, and, in spite of the fine lady airs of which she complained, but which did not in fact, as she well knew, exist, she had no one fault to find with her teacher, whose singularly low salary was, besides, extremely convenient to her finances.

“What an artful creature she must be!” said she, mentally; “to carry on this falsehood so well—and I never to see through that Clark!—well, it's very odd, but every time I saw Mr. Loftus I was reminded of the fellow—but he must be as good an actor as she to take me in so.”

Mrs. Trumble seldom indulged in epistolary correspondence, and was only induced to trust her powers of composition by necessity. Miss Giles' department was exclusively that of literature in all its branches, and she never interfered with that prerogative—for good reasons. She felt, however, that this was an exception, and considered that if she did not give due notice to Miss Fane she might perhaps lay herself open to some difficulties, the mild and gentle character of that young lady, having instantly undergone a transformation in her mind, which represented her as the possessor of every description of evil quality. Under

the excitement of the moment she, therefore, sat herself down to her desk and composed the following epistle, which she lost no time in causing to be forwarded to Clara.

“ Madam,

“ Mrs. Trumble’s compliments to the lady who she has eitherto called her teecher and beg to say that her unwharrentable Conduct in encouraging of mr. Clark and knowing of Him to be Mr. loftus is such that I cannot in footur re-
ceeive you into my rouf for the sake of the Re-
spectful caracter of my School which I flatter myself will not have my doors Darkened by you again.

“ Your box as as been left will be sent whear you desire as I do not wish to take advantage of your misfortin and hopes you will Turn over a new Leaf

“ with surprise at your Conduct

“ Miss Fane, I am

“ Your’s &c.

“ ANN TRUMBLE.”

This letter reached Clara in due course, and filled her mind with the most distressing conjectures: that which she had long feared had evidently now come to pass, and Mrs. Trumble

had become aware, from some other source, of the vexatious truth respecting Mr. Loftus. She reproached herself with not having at once, as soon as she discovered the identity, disclosed it to the persons with whom she resided, and she now trembled least some misstatement should reach the ears of her present kind friends. Her spirits, always so buoyant, began to give way under this trial, which she was congratulating herself on having surmounted, and, still holding Mrs. Trumble's letter in her hand, she remained in an attitude of extreme depression, when the door of the little library in which she sat opened, and Lady Derrington entered. By the unusual gravity of her countenance, Clara saw at once that she had heard something unpleasant relative to herself, and, quite overcome with the probable consequence of the disclosure, she was unable to refrain from a burst of tears, as, throwing herself back in her chair, she covered her face with her hands.

Lady Derrington approached, and seating herself near her spoke in a gentle tone—

“My dear young lady,” said she, “I see by your agitation that you know what has occurred. I am, therefore, spared the pain of relating it to you; can you, as I hope, can you explain this disagreeable mystery in a way to satisfy those

who probably accuse you from some interested motive?"

Clara looked up through her tears, and taking Lady Derrington's offered hand, felt re-assured by the benevolent expression of her countenance, to say—

"I scarcely know what the accusation against me is, this strange letter of Mrs. Trumble's, unfortunately speaks truth, and appearances I am aware are much against me. I am, however, less blameable than she imagines, much as I now reproach myself with having concealed the facts from her. Has she written to your ladyship in the same manner as she has addressed me?"

She gave Mrs. Trumble's letter, as she spoke, to Lady Derrington, who glanced over it with a smile.

"This good lady," said she, "is not likely to take a very delicate course, at all events, in the affair. But she has not favoured me with a similar epistle. It is from one of our neighbours that I am indebted for the narrative, certainly a strange one, which throws blame on you. I have little doubt but that you will be able to clear up the whole affair in a few words. Will you, therefore, let me hear your version, in order that I may have it in my power to reply to any further questions that may be asked me."

“My dear madam,” said Clara, drying her eyes, “it is foolish of me to give way to the sorrow which this last proceeding has caused; I ought to have anticipated, that the unpleasant mystery which I have endured during my stay at Mrs. Trumble’s school, must be some time or other brought to light. I am no further to blame in the affair than that I concealed my recognition of Mr. Loftus when I saw him at the county ball. Although I discovered that the false Mr. Clark was an impostor, I did not know who he really was till then, and as Mr. Loftus’s conduct has since been so entirely opposite to that which he so unaccountably adopted in the first instance, I did not dare, nor did I desire to make known to persons quite uninterested in me, a weakness on his part of which he is now evidently ashamed. I did not name either to Mrs. Wybrow, Mrs. Trumble, or Miss Clinton, these facts for the reasons I give; perhaps I have judged ill, but I assure you, madam, I acted for the best. Had I done otherwise I might have injured Mr. Loftus as well as myself. I grieve to find, that I have not been able to escape doing precisely that which I was striving to avoid.”

The tone of simplicity and candour with which Clara related these circumstances, at once con-

vinced Lady Derrington that she was listening to the truth.

“I wish I had known you before,” said she, “and had had a right to expect your confidence. As you were placed, I think you did right in not making an *éclat*. As for Edmond, he deserves great censure and has very much lowered himself in my esteem : his conduct has been ungenerous and designing ; and his motive, I fear, was bad.”

“I hope, my dear madam,” said Clara, with animation, “it will not be necessary that Mr. Loftus should be informed of all this. I am already placed in a very delicate position as regards him, and, as I really believe he is sorry for his caprice, I hope you will not visit him with your displeasure ; he probably repents already, and it would be useless to wound him further.”

“Do not be too indulgent to him, my dear,” said Lady Derrington, “I know the world better than you do, and I see his motives plainer ; he is not an acquaintance fit for you in your present position. He may be more dangerous than you think ; in the first place because he seeks you, and in the next because he is not a man to be treated with indifference.”

Clara's blush the more convinced Lady Derrington, that the advice she was giving was judicious.

“ Promise me only one thing,” she continued, “ that you will not see Mr. Loftus again while he remains here; let your acquaintance with him drop. I know it has been forced on you and that you do not desire to continue it. I believe Edmond to be no worse than most of the young men in his class; I have hitherto thought him superior to them, but I begin to fear he has not risen above them. You have a hard struggle to sustain in life, placed as you are, dependant on your own prudence and exertions and it is not enough for you to avoid doing evil, but to fly from all appearances of it. The world is very hard-judging and you have too much merit to escape its persecutions; all the precautions that can be taken must be resorted to, to prevent the slightest injury to your reputation, and it is not in the care of Mr. Loftus that it must be left. Rely on me and Isabella to rectify this mistake, as regards you; we will be as tender as we can of our imprudent friend, but since he selfishly exposed you to the chance of slander, he ought to suffer the penalty. Now then, let me insist on your fretting no more, and trying to forget the whole affair; we will all appear at church together to-morrow, and after that I shall take you myself, though I hardly ever go out in a carriage, to call upon all the outraged ladies of our neighbourhood. As

you did not intend to remain with Mrs. Trumble, there is no harm done there and her virtuous indignation will subside, it is to be hoped, into a silence which will in future deprive us of such original letters as the one she has made an effort to concoct, for your edification. I left Isabella in a state of amaze, and after I have released her from it, I shall send her to take you out a walk amongst the Druid Stones, where I hope some oracle exists to proclaim the truth to the discomposed natives of our neighbourhood."

Clara's spirits rose at once with the kind view of the case which Lady Derrington had taken, and as rapidly as she had imagined herself ruined in reputation and fortune for ever, she leaped to the conclusion that all would turn out to her advantage.

During their walk that day, Miss Clinton heard from Clara all those particulars which, from delicacy to Mr. Loftus she had before suppressed. Isabella listened gravely, and observed at the close—

"I have seen but little of life, and know the world more from books than from observation. I may be forgiven then for forming a perhaps prejudiced opinion of men by the few specimens I have seen. So often it has been my lot to observe selfishness and egotism in their character that I

cannot help coming to a conclusion that these qualities form an integral portion of their natures. Women are almost always confiding, generous, and unselfish, and these virtues seem to exist in them for no other reason than to be offered up to the bad feelings of the other sex, who without pity or remorse sacrifice them on the altar of their self-love. When one hears of some noble instance of patriotism, or generosity, or devotion in a public man, just as one has arrived at a pitch of enthusiasm for his great goodness, and has made him almost a god, some revelation of his private conduct and habits at once strips him of all his beams, and shows him to be a being actuated merely by the selfish ambition of fame, striving to obtain a name amongst strangers and proving by each act of his every-day life that he deserves punishment rather than applause. Of what value is the love of a man who seeks to gratify it by the injury of that which he professes to love? He allows himself to be carried away by the violence of some feeling which he calls admiration of beauty, and innocence, and virtue, and he applauds himself for being touched by them, and thinks he is right in using every effort to cast a net over the prey he pursues, and draws it towards him regardless of its pains, and struggles, and sorrows. If he fails to obtain it, his

love usually changes to resentment—he thinks himself ill-used because he has been repulsed, and instead of repenting and rejoicing in having escaped a crime, he revenges himself on the victim he had selected. Men for their own selfish enjoyments, which to them is paramount, sacrifice every tender relation of life, and what would seem to prove their unworthiness the more, is that they can enjoy what they gain at the expense of every one around them. Women may feel remorse for a successful fault—man never: he only hugs himself in its enjoyment, and considers that he has his right when he has stripped every one to supply himself. I am so angry with man that I could be content henceforth to ‘re-nounce all converse with the perfidious sex.’ If I had ever allowed myself to encourage a more indulgent mood respecting them, it was in favour of Edmond Loftus, and now he has shown me that there can exist no purity of intention, no real generosity, no delicacy and no principle in the whole race!”

“Alas!” said Clara, “we are all so full of faults—our best actions are so undecided, our motives so mysteriously hidden, even from ourselves, that it would be unjust to pronounce judgment on others:—

‘Who with repentance is not satisfied,
Is nor of heaven or earth.’

and I do believe that Mr. Loftus is not only sorry for his folly, but if he knew how much danger it has placed me in, from which I could not have been rescued but through the exalted kindness I have met with here, he would be extremely distressed.”

“No such thing,” returned Miss Clinton, “he would merely think we had done our bounden duty to him, had warded off a scandal which might have affected him, and as for the object of his persecution, as she is probably not the first nor will be the last, he will only change his plan on another occasion and proceed with more caution: if he had found that the storm could not be evaded, he would have fled from it—made himself wings and been borne off to some distant region, where the report of his ill-doings would not have reached him. Men are content if they can fly from the consequences of evil, but not content to give it up, fly where they will. But,” she added, smiling at her own anger, “we may talk long enough—it is a poor remedy.

‘Vain privilege poor women have of tongue,
Men can stand silent and resolve on wrong.’”

“My dear Miss Clinton,” said Clara; “I am

bound to respect your prejudice in this instance, even if it be one, because it arises from your kind feeling for me, and your indignation at what seems an injury intended me."

"Seems, madam, nay it is!
I know not—seems!"

interrupted Miss Clinton. "Mr. Loftus, with the best intentions in the world, no doubt, to amuse his leisure, he, a man of fortune and independence, seeks you, a stranger—follows you to a quiet retreat where you have found an honourable employment, interrupts your studies, disturbs your peace, endangers your reputation, and leaves you a prey to malignity and scandal—all for his amusement—because a man has a right to entertain himself and pass his time pleasantly. Suppose he had succeeded in gaining your affection? Suppose you had been impressed with his merits, such as they appear, the result might have been the reality of that which now is supposed by the evil-minded world to have happened. You were made miserable for life, and Mr. Loftus's character would rise as high as ever from its momentary depression. The annihilation of a woman's existence is nothing so that the happiness of a man is secured!"

"Is not this view of the case rather unjust,

dear Miss Clinton?" said Clara, timidly; "if it be granted that there is much selfishness in man, we must not forget that the vanity of woman often leads her into equal errors; and what, after all, is vanity but selfishness? Is it not the pleasure of being admired, of gaining applause for imaginary merits that conducts to enormous faults? Vanity leads women to quit every honourable pursuit and employment, to condescend to the flattery of persons whom she knows to be despicable, to sacrifice herself for words, for air, for a breath, which she is conscious is worthless—without attachment, without feeling, without devotion to her object, she will sometimes submit to become a prey to gratify a puerile vanity which is a Will-o'-the-wisp to lead her into danger. Surely this vanity is a mark for that selfishness? Sometimes when faults are met by resistance, and contempt and coldness are the only reward of idle temerity, a reaction takes place, and a virtue may spring from error, which may in the end redeem it—provided its punishment is not carried too far."

"Ah, Clara, Clara!" said Miss Clinton, looking mournfully at her, "you argue with too much tenderness to be impartial."

"No," replied Clara, blushing; "I try to judge impartially, and surely in the present case

I have a right to be considered so, for I am the injured party, and I plead for the culprit. I allow something for Mr. Loftus's position, and the society in which I first met him, which probably give him an unfavourable impression of me.

"I do not forgive him that," said Miss Clinton, "he should have seen at once in your face what you were, and though he had met you in the midst of the rabble-rout of Comus, he should have recognised in you—'The Lady.'"

"Well," replied Clara, laughing, "he has been obliged to recognise her in me since, and to dispel his enchantments and disguises. The Lady in Comus sat unscathed amongst the wild scenes of which she formed no part—and though I had no brothers to come to my rescue, I found a friend in my need who has served me as well."

"I blame you," said Miss Clinton, "for screening him at all—if you had told me all respecting him at the time you related your history to me, I should have been prepared for this outburst on the part of the envious ladies of our county—as it was, I was taken by surprise, and mamma was shocked. I do not intend to forgive Mr. Loftus for a long time—and as he has been invited by my father to dinner to-day, I recommend that you and I absent our-

selves, and go and drink tea with my nurse Mrs. Woodhouse, in her cottage at the farm at the other end of the park. No doubt Mr. Loftus expects to see you here, and he shall be disappointed, at any rate, which will be the beginning of his penance."

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