

THE
DÉBUTANTE.

BY
MRS. GORE.

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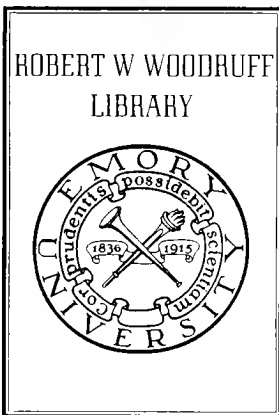
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1861.

THE DÉBUTANTE.

CHAPTER I.

Jul. What think'st thou of the fair Sir Eglamour?
Luc. As of a knight well-spoken, neat, and fine;
But were I you, he never should be mine.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE closing of the London season constitutes, for the fashionable world, the grand crisis of the year. Like the Black Monday or settling-day after the Derby, or the division on the amendment of the Address to the Throne, it serves to recall thoughtless people to their senses. Squanderers of their money, squanderers of their time, squanderers of their reputation, are suddenly brought to book by the grand exigency of leaving town.

But above all, those who have been tasting for the first time the Circean cup of dissipation, the *débutants* and *débutantes* of fashionable life, are apt to be startled into sobriety, when they behold, reflected from the dull expanse of country life before them, the transformations insensibly effected in their own nature. Few people arrive in town predetermined to break bounds. Even the novice, on the eve of being launched into society, fancies herself armed with the strongest resolutions. It is only by degrees that youthful inexperience is beguiled into foolish dissipations, wild orgies, idle expenses, or perilous flirtations. The season in its onset appears endless,—a day without a morrow;—or rather a day with a sober evening for its close, promising abundant leisure for consideration, repentance, and atonement.

But, alas! the hurried termination of the season affords

not so much as a single twilight hour; and the harassed *débutante*, who has been wasting her golden opportunities in inconsistency and irresolution, under the dazzling influence of the sunny beams of noon, is eventually made to understand that a single step divides the garden of Eden in which she has been rejoicing, from the wilderness of briars and thistles where she must walk barefoot and ashamed in expiation of her follies past.

Some summers ago, the carriages were rolling into the court-yard of Heriford House, for the last ball of the season, on a sultry night in July, which caused the windows of its noble suite of state apartments to be thrown open, and justified the sincerity of more than one languid chaperon in her exclamations of thankfulness that on the morrow she was to leave town.

Those who had engaged villas at Cowes for the yachting season, and were consequently secure of renewing the pleasures of London life for six weeks to come, were the most earnest in their mutual congratulations, that, for the present, their labours were at end, and that they were about "to enjoy the quiet of the country." But an observant spectator could not but notice that a general consciousness of regret and disappointment deadened the spirit of the ball. Some affected to ascribe their languor to fatigue; to being "danced off their legs;" or, having been "up till daylight for the last six weeks." But they were evidently thinking of the six weeks, or perhaps six months, to come; during which, they should hear no more the enlivening strains that now excited their gaiety; and no longer behold the familiar faces on which they had been gazing, night after night and day after day, throughout the season, till they began to form an indispensable portion of their perceptions.

The retrospect of their London dissipations might be all confusion; but before them, all was a blank!

Among the persons lounging beside the open windows, gasping for a breath of air after the overpowering heat of the day, and still more overcoming vapours of the adjacent ball-room, was a tall, dark, young man, of strikingly elegant appearance, who was generally pronounced to be one of the best-looking fellows in town: and who, on that point, appeared to be tolerably acquiescent in the opinion of the

world. There was, however, an expression of chagrin in his countenance, and restlessness in his manner, which, handsome as he was, prevented his being altogether prepossessing.

The companion with whom he had retreated into the window, against whose old-fashioned gilded shutters he was leaning, was one of the fairest *débutantes* of the year; a girl of whom it had been predicted on the day of her presentation at the drawing-room by the Marchioness of Heriford, that she would certainly make a great match; but who, having so much faith in the prophecy as to feel certain it would fulfil itself, *quand même*, had resigned herself to the indulgence of her vanity; forgetting in idle flirtation the grand purpose of her London mission, like Hylas on his road to the fountain, gathering flowers by the way.

Eleanor Maitland, though young, rich and fair, was in a position that rendered highly desirable an early settlement in life. But the homage offered to her youth and beauty immediately on her *début*, proved so intoxicating, that she accepted without much scruple whatever incense was laid on her shrine; and, from the moment Charles Barrington, her present partner, attached himself to her train of admirers, had suffered herself to become *affichée* by his attentions, in a manner which caused better men to stand aloof.

It is true the *débutante* had been insensibly led on from ball to ball, till an intimacy was established between them, either unobserved by herself, or which she fancied would pass unobserved of others. Fond of admiration, it was pleasant to be secure of an untirable worshipper; fond of dancing, it was pleasant to have secured a capital partner; fond of riding, it was pleasant to be certain of a talkative companion, when escorted by her brother Sir Wolseley, in the Park. But beyond all this, she had never thought seriously. Little more was known of Mr. Barrington in the world she lived in, than that he had been an Eton and Oxford chum of Lord Henry de Capell, Lady Heriford's second son, and that he was the only son of a man of good family and landed property in the county of Bucks; and though this afforded a sufficient passport into the coteries of fashion for a well-dressed, well-looking young man, fond of dancing, and seen daily on a capital hack in the Park,

Eleanor Maitland was not the girl to pledge either her heart or hand on so shallow a showing.

Of her pretensions, no one was better cognizant than young Barrington himself. The approaching close of the season had compelled him to strike a balance with his conscience. He was aware that the distinctions he had enjoyed in Miss Maitland's favour were the results of misconception,—that he stood in a false position,—that, after parting with her that night at Heriford House, he should probably see her no more till she was the wife of a greater and richer man. But, though convinced of all this, he had enjoyed such pleasant moments by her side,—had suffered himself to be so enthralled by dreams of youthful passion while standing, as now, within reach of the moisture of her breath and the fragrance emanating from her perfumed and braided hair,—that there was some excuse for the sadness by which he was evidently overcome.

He had no justification for proposing to Miss Maitland; no expectation of being recalled by her, at some future moment. But he *did* hope he should be missed and regretted.

So little was the nature of his reverie surmised by the idlers of the *fête*, that most of those who saw the beautiful *débutante* leaning on the arm of her favourite partner beside the open window overlooking the court-yard, felt convinced that he was profiting by the last night of the season for a declaration of his attachment. Lord Newbury, one of the silliest of his gay associates, went whispering about, that “Charley Barrington had paired off with Miss Maitland, and was coming to the scratch;—and even went so far as to offer ten to one that it would be ‘no go.’”

But the gossips were at fault. Never had the apparently favoured man been further from thoughts of a proposal; or the *débutante* less inclined to encourage such an act of presumption. They were simply engaged in satirical remarks upon the newly arriving guests: the dowagerly ark of the old duchess, with the couples of curious animals packed into it, two and two; and the bridal chariot of Lady Barbara Bernardo, betasseled and begilt like the chair of some newly-returned city member.

“By the way, I have a piece of news for you, Mr. Barrington,” said the fair Eleanor, suddenly interrupting his flippant observations.

"I fancy I have forestalled it," replied her handsome partner. "I have just been offering my congratulations to Lady Esher."

"Congratulations to Lady Esher?"

"On her son's return for Mallow, concerning which the family have been so anxious."

"I am not acquainted with the Eshers."

"Surely, I have often seen Sir Wolseley Maitland arm-in-arm with Lord Esher in St. James's Street, or riding with him in the park."

"Few of my brother's friends are mine," rejoined Miss Maitland, carelessly arranging the flowers in her bouquet; "and as to elections, I leave them to the care of Lady Blanche de Capell—the only female politician of my acquaintance. My news is of a wholly selfish nature. I have been making arrangements, this morning, to accompany the Herifords out of town."

"By way of chaperon to Sir Wolseley? who I perceive is all but booked for Lady Mary."

"How little you know my brother! Wolseley is the last man on earth to marry; and, least of all, to select a wife so light-headed and light-hearted as Lady Mary. Besides, he is only to meet us at Heriford Castle for partridge shooting; while *I* have promised to spend the next three weeks at Greensells."

"*At Greensells!*" reiterated Charles Barrington, with an air of mortified surprise.

"A charming place, they tell me, at this time of year. But I ought to apply to *you* for an account of it. Your family, I believe, reside in the county?"

"My father has a small place in Buckinghamshire; but out of visiting distance of Greensells."

"You must make it *within* visiting distance when we are all there," was Miss Maitland's courteous rejoinder. But on *that* point her graciousness appeared less welcome than might have been expected to her young admirer.

"Would that it were in my power!" replied he, evidently embarrassed. "But I am never at home at this time of year. An inland county has few temptations in the month of August."

"I was in hopes the temptation of Lady Heriford's

sojourn at Greensells might suffice. To say the truth, I expected you would receive my news with, at least, some show of satisfaction."

"You would have formed no such expectation, if accustomed to hear all your life, as I have, that Greensells is one of the most unhealthy spots in England!" was his adroit reply. "Situated in the lowest part of Buckinghamshire, and surrounded with water, the place is a bad imitation of Versailles."

"This dreadful hot season would render even the canals of Holland refreshing," pleaded Miss Maitland.

"Surely not at the cost of an ague or typhus fever? the periodical recurrence of which compelled Lord Heriford to desert the house."

"I am not alarmed," cried the reckless girl. "Three weeks are soon over, and I have the restorative of Heriford Castle, which is almost an eagle's eyrie, in perspective. Nor do I quite despair, Mr. Barrington, of your giving up your yachting engagements in our favour. We shall want you sadly as a cicerone for our riding parties. Lord Clandon has not visited the county since he was a boy; and is at all times so absent, that he would lose his way in Hyde Park were it not for the posts and rails!"

Charles Barrington was luckily spared the necessity of committing himself by a positive reply; for the lovely Eleanor, who was too popular a partner to be long left undisturbed in the embrasure of a window, was now claimed, in succession, for "the next valse," "the next polka," "the valse after the next." With a heavy sigh, therefore, he watched the floating of the white draperies around her graceful figure as she re-entered the ball-room, leaning on the arm of her young relative Lord Henry de Capell, the person to whom he was indebted for the dangerous happiness of her acquaintance.

"And this, then, is to be the end of it all!" mused he, returning to lean out of the open window, the moment she disappeared through the portals of the brilliantly-lighted ball-room. "Before we meet again, she will have learned to despise me as a fortune-hunter!—how little surmising the evil influence she has exercised over my own destinies."

Charles Barrington was, in fact, a mere accidental recruit

in the ranks of fashion. After taking his degree at Oxford early in the spring, he had obtained the sanction of his father, of whom he was in some measure independent, to his passing a few weeks of the season in town (previous to his departure for the continent to perfect himself in the French language), without any definite project of launching himself in the world of pleasure. His Eton and college noviciate had, however, supplied him with intimacies, in which the distinction of his personal appearance counted largely. A collision with his old friend, Lord Henry de Capell, in the crush-room at the Opera, on the very night of his arrival in London, forced upon him a ticket for Lady Barbara Bernardo's ball, for which his lordship was the licensed purveyor of dancing-men; and, from that moment, Charles Barrington managed to forget not only himself, but most other things in the world except the beautiful *débutante*.

At first, it was only her delicate complexion and graceful form by which his fancy was enthralled. But when introduced to her by Lord Henry as "my friend, Charley Barrington—an old Eton chum of mine, a famous fellow—a capital *valseur*," he had been so graciously received, that there was every pretext for his going home to dream of her that night as an idol for his future life, and accepting with eagerness the invitations for balls and *fêtes* that soon poured in upon so great and untirable a dancer, who was Henry de Capell's bosom friend. At the close of the week, he judged it desirable to remove from his obscure lodgings to a fashionable hotel; and to hire for the remainder of the season the best horse that hiring would procure, in order to render himself more deserving of her notice.

To the four plain, but fashionable-looking daughters of the Marchioness of Heriford, he recommended himself, meanwhile, by the most deferential assiduity as a partner; and to the marchioness herself, by calling her carriage and fetching her shawl, like a galley-slave, night after night, only to obtain toleration in the set in which Eleanor Maitland was moving. By these means he avoided such particularity of attention towards the fair *débutante* as might have provoked a premature explanation.

Had she chosen, she might have easily shaken him off. Had his homage been distasteful, a frown from the mar-

chioness, who officiated as her chaperon, or a hint from the self-sufficient brother, of whom she was the ward, would at any moment have sufficed to dismiss him. But Eleanor had motives of her own for wishing the game to be played out.

Hard fate, for one so young and fair to be involved in a game! But, though rich, not only in natural adornments but in high connexions and a fortune of fifty thousand pounds (which, in a *clique* so accustomed to exaggerate as the one in which she lived, was usually cited at a hundred, so as to elevate her to the rank of an heiress), Eleanor was born under an inauspicious star, and had been almost compelled into coquetry by the heartlessness of her kith and kin.

The daughter of a mother who had deserted her husband and children, and still survived in ignominious profligacy on the continent, her father, Sir John Maitland, had never spared her, even in her tenderest girlhood, the expression of his hatred towards her mother, and contempt of her sex; and on his death, the preceding year, her only brother, Sir Wolseley, had succeeded not only to his father's estates, but to his selfishness and antipathies. Not even the beauty and helplessness of the young girl left to his charge could blind him to the injury inflicted on his name by the misconduct of their mother; or the inconvenience, to a man of his age, of being guardian to a minor.

Having dismissed the governess by whom his sister was brought up, that there might be a woman the less, and consequently a nuisance the less at the Cub Castle at which he was all impatience to exercise undivided authority, he abruptly signified to his sister, that he had secured a house for the season in town, and that their relative, the Marchioness of Heriford, consented to officiate as her chaperon.

"No! don't thank *me*, and don't waste your gratitude upon *her*!" cried Sir Wolseley, in reply to her expressions of satisfaction: "Lady Heriford knows what she is about. Lady Heriford has three sons to dispose of; to neither of whom such a fortune as yours, Nell, would come amiss; and four daughters (with scarcely so much beauty among the four as would form a decent-looking woman), whom you will shortly see fishing with all their tackle for the honour of becoming Lady Maitland, of Wolseley Hall."

"I would not give much for their chance!" replied his

sister, endeavouring to smile. "But I am not the less obliged for the care you have taken to procure me so pleasant and advantageous an *entrée* into the world."

"I may have made it pleasant; it depends on yourself to make it profitable," was the reckless rejoinder of Sir Wolseley. "For I will not deceive you, Nell. This first London season must be your last! There are always plenty of fools to be caught by a pretty face, as well as plenty of wise men by a pretty fortune. Besides Clandon and his brother, you will soon have plenty of fellows in your train; and feeling as I do my total unfitness to be dry nurse to a Miss in her teens (particularly in a family where—but no matter!)—feeling all this, I say, I cannot but advise you to make it your object to obtain a comfortable settlement in life; or, by Jove, next spring, instead of a box at the Opera, you must content yourself with listening to the cawing of the rooks at Wolseley Hall."

Such was first lesson in worldly wisdom imparted to the *débutante*; and, at an age when most girls are free to enjoy without hindrance or project the pleasures of the ball-room, the feelings of Eleanor Maitland were constantly embittered by reverting to the taunts and menaces of her brother. She had promised herself, indeed, on reaching London, that never, *never* would she return to the old place, to be a burthen upon one so unfeeling. Even an indifferent husband would be less hard to bear with than so unkind a brother.

Suitors, however, had not presented themselves so readily as might have been anticipated. It seemed to be understood in the world, perhaps at Lady Heriford's suggestion, that Miss Maitland was to marry one of the sons of her chaperon; although of those sons, Lord Clandon, the eldest, was too shy to look a woman in the face; Lord Henry too great a *roué*, and too much affected by his cousin Sir Wolseley's example and precepts, to have the smallest vocation for matrimony; while Lord Algernon, the youngest, was with his regiment abroad. No one worth mentioning had come forward in their place. An Irish baronet, whose brogue was as broad as his estate was narrow, had been dismissed, almost without a hearing; and a little German count, with a nose and temper as fiery as a capsicum, had

come, seen, been conquered, and sent to the right about. But, till the introduction of Charles Barrington, not a man appeared sufficiently struck by the charms of the *débutante*, to overlook the objection to the daughter of such a mother, as a partner for life.

Whatever might be her opinion of his pretensions, his homage was certainly far from discouraged. Sir Wolseley, having heard young Barrington announced by Lord Henry as a young man of family and fortune, had not judged it necessary to interfere; and the flirtation proceeded through the usual routine of balls and *déjeuners*, and became a thing of course. People grew accustomed to see the handsome couple ride together every morning, and dance together every evening; till the Ladies de Capell, who, though no beauties, possessed the tact which, in their caste, constitutes cleverness, began to express themselves a little uneasy concerning the intimacy of their fair cousin with one of whose antecedents they knew so little.

“Henry’s friend is very good-looking,” said Lady Alicia, the eldest and shrewdest of the girls; “but handsome *is* what handsome *has*; and papa declares that there is nothing of the name of Barrington, in Buckinghamshire, above the condition of a *hobereau*.”

“Papa’s memory is scarcely to be trusted on a point so little interesting to him as the rent-roll of one of his country neighbours,” rejoined her sister, the more generous Lady Sophia;—“and if the handwriting of Nature go for anything, Mr. Barrington is certainly a gentleman.”

“*Je ne dis pas non*. But is he one of the *Landed* gentry?—Burke has nothing to say to him.”

“And I hope Nelly will have nothing to say to him!” cried the third sister, the giddy Lady Mary. “I have set my heart on having her for a sister-in-law of my own.”

“By *your* marriage with Sir Wolseley, or hers with Henry or Algernon?” demanded Lady Alicia, with a provoking smile.

“Either—or both—unless you forbid the banns!” replied Lady Mary, unresentingly. “But why should she not marry the heir-apparent? Where would Clandon find a wife likely to do him half so much honour, or make *him* do half so much to maintain his position in life?”

“Clandon is so hopeless a bear,” said Lady Alicia, shrugging her shoulders.

“Rather say, so shy!” modified Lady Sophia, in an extenuating tone.

“That it is a hopeless task to form projects in his favour,” added the eldest sister.

“But if Eleanor should have attached herself to this Mr. Barrington,” said Lady Blanche, the fourth sister, who, being the ugliest, affected the rational young lady, “what right have we to interfere with her preference? She is old enough, and, above all, rich enough to choose for herself!”

“It would not be the less lamentable, poor thing, if she made a foolish choice,” rejoined Lady Sophia. “Eleanor’s happiness is at stake. She has no mother to advise her. She made the acquaintance of Mr. Barrington under our roof; and if it should turn out that he is less worthy of her than he appears—”

“If you mean less worthy by so many thousands a year, my dear Sophy,” rejoined Lady Alicia, “set your mind at ease. Eleanor will shortly judge with her own eyes of the *beau* Barrington’s family and fortune. Mamma has invited her to Greensells.”

“And Sir Wolseley, too?” exclaimed Lady Blanche, with a significant glance at her sister Mary, who was supposed to exercise a certain influence over her mother. “Are we going to bring down two birds with one stone?”

“After the kindness my mother has shown to Eleanor, by acting as her chaperon throughout the season, surely it is only fair to give her an opportunity of knowing something more of a man presented to her by ourselves, before she takes so irretrievable a step as marriage?” pleaded Lady Sophia.

“Certainly, certainly!” cried her sister Mary, with warmth; while the other two sisters echoed with modified enthusiasm, “Certainly!”

Such was the position of affairs which, at the ball at Heriford House, imparted considerable interest to the projected departure of the family. But in order to account for the gloom with which the mere announcement sufficed to overspread the handsome face of Charles Barrington, it may be as well to afford a glimpse of the home to which, a

few hours after the explanation vouchsafed him by Miss Maitland, he despatched a letter, announcing that, "in order to recruit himself, after the dissipations of the season, he was about to spend a few weeks in the bosom of his family; and that he might be expected the following day at Easton Hoo."

CHAPTER II.

The world was guilty of such a ballad three hundred years ago. But now, 'tis not to be found. And if it were, 'twould neither serve for the writing nor the times.—SHAKESPEARE.

"CHARLES will have beautiful weather for his journey from town," observed Mrs. Barrington, a meek-looking little woman, whose age was rendered problematical by the smoothness and whiteness of the forehead, over which her all but silver hair was simply parted;—addressing her surly husband, who, having risen from the breakfast table after his second cup of tea, stood drumming with his knuckles against the parlour casement, and staring out upon the corn-fields, divided from his modest lawn and shrubbery only by a haha, as intently as if counting the shocks of corn.

"No chance of rain, I think, before his arrival?" added the lady, making, in a conciliating voice, a second attempt at sociability. And the state of the weather was a topic on which, even in his most taciturn moments, Mr. Barrington was always accessible.

"It will rain before night!" was his gruff rejoinder; "and I promise you, you have no chance of Charles before next week, at the soonest."

"You did not read the letter, then, which I sent into your study?"

"As much as was necessary. He writes you word to expect him in time for dinner; which, knowing his habits, I interpret in my own way. Charles is never happier than when putting us to useless trouble and expense."

"He could hardly suppose, poor fellow, that we should

make any extraordinary preparation for his arrival," pleaded his mother, affectionately. "Even when at home, Charles is never waited for."

"He never *used* to be waited for. But so fine a gentleman as he appears to be grown in London will doubtless be expecting all sorts of attentions."

"Certainly not from *us*,—certainly not *here!*" persisted his mother. "You will see presently that you are mistaken. I am certain he means to come."

"At *his* age, young men seldom know *what* they mean," retorted Mr. Barrington. "If, on the eve of starting, any one proposed a pleasant party to him, I promise you he would feel little scruple about throwing us over. So, as to my sending the carriage for him to the station, you need not think of it. The horses have got a hard day's work before them to-morrow, in the harvest-field."

"Of course. Believe me, I never dreamt of sending the carriage," replied the meek wife. "A young man finds his way so easily across the country! There are both flies and post-horses always waiting at the station."

"Flies and post-horses! yes! at the cost of a first-class place in the mail train from London to Bath. However, Charles pays his own travelling expenses; so it is no affair of mine. In my time, a young man thought nothing of accomplishing such a distance on foot. But it has been part of your system to train him in habits of wanton extravagance, which I hope you may not live to repent. If my brother chooses to confer upon him the premium for folly and idleness you seem to expect, so much the better for both!"

Mrs. Barrington argued no further. Experience had taught her, that when her husband was in his present contradictory mood—a mood not uncommon with country gentlemen in a harvest crisis, when the glass is falling and their wheat upon the ground—remonstrance is but aggravation. Charles's cause would be little benefitted by taking up his defence. But Mr. Barrington *chose* to be quarrelled with. "Though, in spite of Charles's letter, I have not the smallest expectation of seeing him till next week," said he, "I confess it rather surprised me to find he had thoughts of coming at all. Only a fortnight ago, he con-

descended to inform us that he had engagements every night, or rather that he was dancing till four or five o'clock every morning; so that I had little reason to suppose he would be leaving London so abruptly."

"The season must be pretty nearly over," replied his gentle wife—resolved to say as little as possible. "Parliament will be up in a week or two."

"And why not stay till then?"

"You seemed so greatly to disapprove the expenses likely to arise from a prolonged season in town, that, in my last letter, I hinted to him it was time for him to be here."

"Just like you! Perpetually making mischief out of my confidential communications."

"I did not wish poor Charles to incur your displeasure."

"If you made it your business to prevent *that*, you would have a hard time of it!" retorted Mr. Barrington; and his poor wife endeavoured not to look *too* fully convinced of the truth of the observation.

"The fact is," resumed her husband, finding her obstinately mute, "that, in matters where a hint to your son might be the means of sparing me expense or vexation, you would cut your right hand off, sooner than trouble yourself to write a line!"

"I have corresponded very regularly with Charles during his stay in town," replied the submissive wife. "I was ready to give any message from you—I was not aware you had any particular——"

"You never *are* aware of what I most wish you to understand!" interrupted her lord and most complete master, cutting her short. "But any person of moderate capacity might have conceived, unsuggested, that, since it is not convenient to the Cornburys to receive Maria Brenton before the end of the autumn, it would be more agreeable if Charles contrived to pay, just now, the round of country visits he seems inclined to postpone till the hunting-season. In one word, I have the greatest objection to having him staying in the house with his cousin, at this season of the year, when there is nothing on earth to amuse him, and they may think proper to make the dulness of the house an excuse for falling in love."

"If Charles and Maria were so disposed," observed Mrs.

Barrington, piqued out of her usual brevity, "they would scarcely have waited till now. But, in my opinion, cousins seldom fall in love with each other, except in novels; unless their friends put it into their heads by needless precautions."

"I understand your taunt, madam, I understand your taunt!" cried the domestic tyrant; "but, considering the difficulty there has always been found in putting *anything* into the head of your son, his father's prudence is scarcely likely to produce the danger you foresee. However, 'tis too late *now* to discuss the matter. He is coming to-morrow, you are good enough to inform me. I ought to have taken measures before; or, rather, to have looked forward to the present emergency, before I was fool enough to sanction Maria Brenton's residence under my roof."

"You could not, under any circumstances, have refused your poor sister on her deathbed!" pleaded Mrs. Barrington in a low voice.

"Why not, pray, if my weak acquiescence were to prove an equal injury to the girl and to my son? But, as I said before, it is too late to dispute about it,—only that women are glad to convert any possible subject into a pretext for squabbling. For these five years past, Maria has been artfully insinuating herself into Charles's affections; and now that they are of an age rendering their relative position dangerous, instead of palliating the mischief, you contrive to have Charles idling away his summer at Easton, where there is not a thing of any sort or kind to amuse him, except his cousin's society; and manage that the Cornburys (who are as closely related to Maria on her father's side as I on her mother's)——"

"Mr. Cornbury is only her second cousin!" faltered his wife, in scarcely audible accents.

"You manage, I say, that the Cornburys, who are her near relations, and to whom you were long ago requested to state my desire to be freed altogether, or in part, from the trouble of Miss Brenton's guardianship, should fancy it inconvenient to make the necessary change in their establishment for receiving her before Christmas next; when it will not signify a straw whether she goes or comes, since I have all but consented to Charles's spending the winter abroad."

“ I am really very sorry ”—Mrs. Barrington *tried* to begin. But she was silenced in a moment.

“ No, you are not sorry,—you are delighted to see me exposed to what *you* call ‘needless’ anxiety! It is, in fact, all your own doing. *You* persuaded me to let Maria Brenton become our inmate. You are always praising her sweet temper and notable qualities in presence of Charles; nor have you ever attempted the smallest precaution to prevent the young people being together.”

“ Thanks to which,” replied his wife, “ they are, at this moment, totally indifferent to each other! If anything, I suspect that Charles rather dislikes his cousin;—in the first place, from jealousy of my affection for her; in the next —” She paused.

“ Well, madam!—In the next?—Have you any objection to finish your sentence? ”

“ Not if you require it. In the next (I was about to say), as the origin of constant altercations on the part of his father. I am convinced that Charles never hears you indulge in—in abuse of poor Maria Brenton,—without heartily wishing her out of the house.”

“ Thank you!—I see *now* why you could not afford to be candid!—Whenever my back is turned, you and your son and niece doubtless amuse yourselves by sitting in judgment on my harshness. But I am accustomed and prepared to meet, in my own family, with nothing but opposition and ingratitude! Make up your minds, however, on one point;—that the day on which I discover anything like a mutual understanding between Maria and Mr. Charles Barrington is the last she stays in my house!—Home or no home, out she goes!—She will be of age next March; till when, there are plenty of respectable boarding-schools where they would be glad to receive her.”

Mrs. Barrington loved her husband’s niece too sincerely to utter a syllable in reply. Aware that it was essential to her comfort and respectability to find shelter for the present at Easton, she took care not to render poor Maria still more obnoxious, by any show of partizanship; and right thankful was she when a gleam of sunshine was soon afterwards followed by the dispersion of the skiey influences which had so unfortunately overclouded her husband’s cornfields, and temper.

Away he went to recall his scattered harvest-men ; and a few minutes sufficed to restore the mild woman, who had suffered herself to be almost irritated by his unjust aspersions, to the even tenor of her way.

She had no fears for her son on poor Maria's account. She almost wished she *had*. To have found her handsome Charles in danger from companionship with a girl chiefly remarkable for the sweetness of her temper and gentleness of her manners would have proved him to be far less worldly, far less a slave to fashion and appearances, than of late she had reason to suppose him. With something of a sigh, however, she admitted that all was for the best ; or, at least, that it was well such complete incompatibility of character existed between the cousins. For Mr. Barrington was a man whom no sort of consideration would have swayed from his opposition to a match so imprudent ; and in the struggle, the happiness of the poor orphan would have been sacrificed without remorse.

When, after her usual round of domestic duties, Mrs. Barrington found Maria Brenton seated quietly at work, as usual, in the morning-room, which she had set silently in order and adorned with flowers of not too powerful a fragrance, selected according to the well-studied tastes of her aunt, she patted the kind-hearted girl affectionately on the shoulder, contenting herself with a secret expression of thankfulness that matters had turned out as they were. Highly as she could have prized Maria as a daughter-in-law, she was satisfied that, for the happiness of all parties, it was better she should remain her niece.

The home of the Barrington family, whose sovereignty was thus unequally divided, was a small seat on the boundary line between Bucks and Herts ; a line so perplexed by hill and dale, and so lost in woodlands, as to render it difficult to all but Mr. Barrington himself, to be certain that the former county contained his place of residence.

He would as soon it had been anywhere else. Though the site was strikingly pretty, and the grounds, for the size of the estate, unusually diversified, and though the place was his by some centuries of inheritance, it found little favour in his sight. In the first place, it was settled upon his wife ; and the notion that, in case of her survival, she

would be able to enjoy her independence there and say her soul was her own, connected itself painfully with the pleasant aspect of the spot, so as often to suspend his hand when meditating improvements. But a far greater source of irritation was it to reflect that the Easton estate was all that remained to him of a property of five thousand a year, which he had alienated by wanton imprudence.

As is often the case, Mr. Barrington's temper having been squandered with his fortune, he was disposed to revenge upon others the evils of his own creation. Every year, he seemed to grow angrier and angrier with his wife and son, that his folly should have wasted four-fifths of their substance; and that the paltry shifts to which he had recourse for the improvement of his income had no other result than to make the family uncomfortable, without leaving in his banker's hands, at the close of the year, a balance worthy the noting. Though he contrived to be thought a shabby fellow by his neighbours, to be called a skinflint by his servants, and to reduce his wife and son to the necessity of preserving the strictest silence touching his proceedings, the sum realized by his sordid economy was almost as contemptible as his former flighty improvidence.

Surprise was often expressed among his country neighbours that a man of Barrington's sordid nature should have been moved, even by the death-bed appeal of a sister, to admit a supernumerary into his household. For even those most familiar with his parsimonious habits were far from suspecting that of the pittance of £130 per annum, inherited by his niece, one half was annually retained by her niggardly uncle for Miss Brenton's board and lodging; or that he was never weary of reproaching his wife for bringing up the poor girl in habits of extravagance, because the remaining half was necessarily appropriated to her personal expenses. It is true that Mrs. Barrington was forced to content *herself* with considerably less. But she seemed to think there was no occasion that her husband should be propitiated by a second victim. -

On finding, therefore, that in spite of Maria's contribution to the maintenance of the house,—nay, in spite of her amiable submission to her uncle's coarsely expressed command, that “the girl should be made useful,” their

Pharaoh still hardened his heart, still grumbled, still threatened further encroachment on the residue of her small allowance,—and, above all, still tormented the poor girl with prohibitions concerning her cousin Charles, such as might have tempted any other young lady into a fit of coquetry,—the compassionate aunt had not only acceded to his proposition that the Cornburys should be applied to on Miss Brenton's behalf, but earnestly encouraged Maria to be thankful for the exchange.

She could not bear to see the best years of the young girl's life fretted and fumed away in listening to unreasonable reproaches. The neighbourhood contained few young people,—none in circumstances to afford her the chance of a settlement in life; whereas, with the Cornburys she had better prospects,—a more cheerful house, a wider circle of acquaintance; and the prudent aunt wiped away the tears with which her young charge submitted to the arrangement of her destinies; assuring her, with an affectionate kiss, that all was for the best.

Impossible for *her* to insinuate to poor Maria, that, in addition to the harshness of her uncle, she would soon perhaps have to endure the slights of her cousin; Charles Barrington having already more than once insinuated that Maria's presence in the house was a vexatious restraint,—a perpetual aggravation of his father's ill-humour.

So strong was this impression on her mind, that, as the moment announced by Charles for his arrival from town drew near, she was thankful to find that Maria was engaged to dine early at Easton Vicarage; little suspecting that the invitation had been eagerly canvassed for by the poor girl, who was better aware than she appeared to be of the antipathies of which she was the object.

By walking home late in the evening, Maria trusted she should have afforded sufficient time for confidential discussion between the mother and son. But previous to quitting the house she had taken care that all should be arranged in the nicest order in Charles Barrington's room; the toilet cover and muslin curtains renewed; the old-fashioned drawers neatly papered; the bureau furnished with the best writing materials; and even the old spar ornaments on the chimney-piece brightened with flowers.

More, indeed, would have been attempted, but for Maria's apprehension that her interference might attract notice. For, though the greater part of the allowance so grudged her by her uncle was wasted in procuring for the fastidious Charles, during his visits to the Hoo, some portion of the luxuries to which he was accustomed elsewhere, and which his father would have regarded as a criminal indulgence, she contrived to obtain them, as for herself, from the nearest market town.

"So Maria is with you still?"—said Charles, carelessly, to his mother, as they sat together, waiting for tea, while the master of the house proceeded on his usual stealthy twilight round of his little farm, to satisfy himself that no deprecations were going on, and that all was safe for the night.

"Yes; the Cornburys cannot receive her before the winter."

"So much the better. Before that time, something may, perhaps, occur to prevent her leaving you at all. In the secluded life you lead, mother, she is rather a comfort to you than an incumbrance."

"A comfort, indeed! But I have no right, poor girl, to consider only *that!*" rejoined Mrs. Barrington. "At her age, it is better for her to reside where she will see more of the world."

"I don't suppose Maria would be happier anywhere than here. She always seems cheerful."

"Still, my dear Charles, young people require recreation."

"A girl with three thousand pounds and no connexion to push her in the world had much better learn to do without it. Maria Brenton was born to lead a humdrum life. You, mother, whose early years were spent in the world, have much greater cause to complain of the dulness of Easton."

Mrs. Barrington was about to suggest, as she would have done had some country neighbour alluded to her solitude, that her husband seldom quitted home, that she was rarely "alone." But with her son such hypocrisy was useless; with her son such hypocrisy was impossible. No one knew better than Charles that his mother was never so thoroughly solitary as in a matrimonial *tête-à-tête*.

She had married Mr. Barrington, as London girls are apt to do, after a few weeks' acquaintance; apprized of the

amount of his income, and respectability of his family; but of his temper, principles, and habits, knowing little or nothing. Her gentle disposition precluding all ambition of domestic government; for the first ten years of her married life she contented herself with the care of her only child, and the enjoyment of two pleasant country-houses, and a few months every season in town, without inquiring the nature of the speculations which secured her a round of pleasures exceeding their nominal fortune; and the shock which accompanied the final crash of Mr. Barrington's affairs was unfortunately aggravated by the discovery, that, like certain flowers which exhibit their brilliant colouring only while the sun shines, the temper of her husband could assume the most sombre hues in the shade.

Redeemed from utter ruin by the enjoyment of the estate of Easton, which was settled upon his wife, thenceforward the whole care of the ruined prodigal was to replace by the accumulation of farthings the thousands of pounds he had lavished away; and, humbly submitting to their change of destiny, the only point on which Mrs. Barrington attempted opposition to his wishes regarded the education of their son.

On finding her promising boy condemned to saunter away his days at Easton, picking up such rudiments of learning as could be afforded by the clerk of the parish, and schooled by his father only in the meanest practices of domestic economy, she took courage to disclose her anxieties on the subject to a younger brother of her husband, who was in the enjoyment of a high appointment in the civil service of the India Company at Madras. By a deceased wife, Humphrey Barrington was the father of two daughters. But she trusted that the interest he had occasionally expressed in the well-being of the future representative of the family might induce him, in their fallen fortunes, to afford the means of bringing him up a gentleman.

The frank appeal of the affectionate mother produced more effect than she had ventured to anticipate. Though Humphrey Barrington had obstinately refused to advance a sixpence towards assisting his brother in embarrassments wantonly incurred, he assigned an allowance of four hundred per annum to his sister-in-law, to be applied exclusively to the use and benefit of her son.

“Send him to Eton and Oxford, and let him prepare himself for the study of the law,” wrote the generous uncle. “At twenty-five he will be able to earn an independence upon such a foundation, or be worth no further care. The allowance will consequently at that age be withdrawn.”

“Send him to Eton and Oxford?” reiterated Mr. Barrington, on perusing his brother’s letter, after a vehement burst of indignation that it should ever have been called forth by the indiscreet application of his wife. “Fine training, truly, for a young fellow who, at my death (and I have thirty years’ life in me yet), will inherit a modest thousand a-year! My brother, no doubt, thinks he has done wonders in supplying him with the means of accomplishing his future ruin. Thank Heaven, however, I am not quite mad enough to sanction the ambitious scheme of either mother or son.”

But when the moment arrived for executing the threat made in his haste, that he would return to Humphrey’s agent the first half-yearly instalment of the allowance, a timely reflection that the act amounted not only to the rejection of a sum of five thousand pounds, but that it might be the means of frustrating any testamentary concession contemplated by his brother in Charles’s favour, induced him to be persuaded into the reversal of his rash decree.

From ten years old, therefore, to three-and-twenty, Charles Barrington had been enjoying the fruits of his uncle’s liberality, and two more had still to elapse previous to the withdrawal of the allowance. But the study of the law formed no part of his arrangements. Having contrived to persuade his parents, that the aristocratic connexions he had formed at school and college would secure his advancement in a diplomatic career, whereas it was utterly impossible that, as a barrister, he should have achieved at five-and-twenty the means of independence, he obtained Mr. Barrington’s sanction to his sojourn for a few weeks among his London friends, previous to departure for the Continent to perfect his acquirements as a linguist.

Had not the gentleman-farmer’s perceptions of the ways of the world been somewhat weakened by long seclusion from society, he would probably have repudiated the scheme, as somewhat akin to his own wild speculations. But he was a cold-hearted as well as a narrow-minded man. The ulti-

mate interests of his son weighed less with him than his personal comfort; and anything seemed preferable rather than have him residing at Easton, a young man, in the enjoyment of four hundred a-year, possessed of a pretty cousin, a double-barrelled gun, and a clever hack. His brother had already announced himself as on the eve of his return to Europe, for the enjoyment of the ample fortune to the realization of which he had devoted nearly thirty years of his life; and Mr. Barrington entertained little doubt that, on becoming personally acquainted with his handsome nephew, the bounties already conceded would be made permanent for life. Nay, in the secrecy of his heart, he nothing doubted that the favoured Charles would be hereafter converted into a son-in-law, preparatory to adoption as the heir of the rich nabob; but for which conviction, he would have been the last man in the world to sanction the habits of expense in which his son must have been indulging in town.

Such were the antecedents of the showy-looking Sir Eglamour, who, on the entrance of his cousin soon after the removal of the tea-things, rose to greet her with the careless familiarity of an old acquaintance. To have offered his services to fetch poor Maria home from the vicarage would have been an offence to his father; but even to place a chair for her now she had made her appearance, was an effort of politeness which he evidently considered superfluous. For Miss Brenton occupied in the house a position little better than that of an upper servant.

Any other cousin, any other familiar friend, would have reproached her for absenting herself from home, at the moment of his return to Easton, after several months' absence. But the best compliment he could find to greet her with was,—“How horribly pale you are looking, Maria! Bored to death, I suppose, by those two wretched old dornice, Dr. and Mrs. Forsyth.”

“I passed a very pleasant evening. But, unfortunately, I met my uncle as I was crossing the Malster meadows,” replied Miss Brenton, in a tremulous voice, as if in explanation of her emotion, “and he seemed displeased that John should have been sent to fetch me home.”

“Oh! you have been walking home with my father!”

rejoined Charles, as if the announcement conveyed a sufficient explanation of her being out of spirits. "Perhaps he fancied you had been robbing his wood-stack or rick-yard? But no matter! he will take care to let us know his grievances by-and-by, and not in the mildest English.—And so, mother," continued he, as if resuming a conversation broken off by the entrance of Miss Brenton—"though I had no intention on reaching town of launching myself in the *beau monde*, the manner in which I was received by Lady Heriford when presented to her by my friend Lord Henry de Capell, who is her favourite son, was such as to render it impossible to decline the invitations and introductions she procured me."

"It was to the Marchioness of Heriford, then, you were indebted for Miss Maitland's acquaintance?" inquired Mrs. Barrington; and, though for the last fifteen years an alien from the coteries in which her son had been recently struggling through his noviciate, she could easily understand that, guaranteed by a fastidious marchioness, her handsome Charles had been somewhat more acceptable than as the obscure son of a Buckinghamshire squire. She did not, however, hazard an observation calculated to damp the spirits that brightened his large dark eyes and imparted such elasticity to his fine figure; contenting herself with listening, and requiring Maria to listen, without more than an occasional ejaculation of surprise or satisfaction, to his account of the brilliant *fêtes* in which he had played his part; wherein the name of Elcanor Maitland recurred, of course, more frequently than is customary in any case, save that of a romance and its heroine.

So warm was the enthusiasm with which he described the grace of her dancing, the elegance of her dress, and the distinction of her manners, that even his mother felt a little startled,—almost a little shocked,—at the readiness with which he suddenly dropped his voice on his father's entrance into the room, to prose about the price of clover and value per bushel of carrots, as though no topic more interesting had been previously under discussion.

After replying to his questions with some semblance of satisfaction that his son's fashionable engagements had afforded leisure for the study of agricultural interests, Mr. Barrington

ton turned towards his niece with the intention of resuming his reprimand concerning her encroachment on the services of his household. But the paleness of Maria's face, around which her light-brown hair was hanging uncurled by the damps of the evening, imparted to her so piteous an aspect, as to inspire even her uncle with compassion.

A moment afterwards, on the plea of the fatigues of Charles's journey in the heat of the day, they took their candles to retire to bed half an hour earlier than usual.

"Where did *this* come from?" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Barrington, as they were quitting the room, pointing, with an angry face, to a wax-light in a china candlestick, which, somehow or other, had found its way into the hand of his son.

"It is mine, uncle. It belongs to my dressing-table, and I left it here for my cousin," faltered Maria, with the air of a delinquent; for, as Mr. Barrington usually retired before the rest of the family, she had trusted that her thoughtfulness for Charles's comforts might pass unnoticed. But there was no help for it; and while the object of her good-natured interference glided quietly out of the room with the taper in his hand, she remained submissively behind, exposed to her uncle's often-reiterated assurances that, "considering his liberality towards her, and the cost she occasioned in his household, her affectation of requiring luxuries beyond *his* humble reach, was as unprincipled as it was unbecoming."

Miss Brenton listened in silence. She was *accustomed* to listen in silence. Her cousin retained possession of his prize,—which was all that mattered; and when, at length, she reached her own chamber, sufficient was the reward to her affectionate nature, to watch unobserved the light from Charles's windows, which were in the opposite wing of the house, and know that she had spared him an additional disgust, under the uncongenial roof he was forced to call his home.

CHAPTER III.

Some there are that account wife and children but as bills of charges.—BACON.

It was one of the few consolations of Maria Brenton's cheerless life, that she was admitted further into the confidence of her cousin Charles than either his father or mother. It did not occur to *her* that this was a further proof of his indifference; that he stood as little in awe of her opinion as under submission to her authority. He could "say what he liked to Maria." And say it he *did*;—not only because no better listener was at hand, but because her aid was essential to him in a thousand selfish arrangements. Such was the real origin of the occasional *tête-à-têtes* which so alarmed the narrow prudence of her uncle.

"Were you not surprised, Maria," said the fine gentleman, on finding Miss Brenton employed in sorting garden-seeds for her aunt in the parlour the following day, after breakfast, while his father and mother were occupied in their household inspections, "to hear of my coming down to Easton at this detestable time of year?"

"Not *much* surprised. I have heard you say that all country-houses are insupportable in August; and Easton, insupportable all the year round. So, perhaps, if not at Cowes, you may as well be at home."

"Admirably argued! I had no idea there was half so much logic in that housewifely little head!" replied he, laughing. "But between ourselves, Maria, I have other motives for my visit. Some particular friends of mine are coming into this confounded neighbourhood, whom you must do your best to help me to entertain."

Miss Brenton, whose notions of the neighbourhood were confined to the vicarage, the Chalkneys of Pountney Hill, and two or three squires, of moderate dignity, living near them, readily promised her assistance.

"I need not tell you, however," added she, "how little I have it in my power to influence the movements of Easton. No chance of any person being invited here at *my* request."

“Invited *here!*” retorted her cousin, shrugging his shoulders with an air of indescribable scorn. “Surely you don’t fancy my friends have deserved so ill of me, as that I should betray them into a visit to this dullest of dull houses? No, no! All I ask of you, my dear Maria, is, that if Sir Wolseley Maitland and his sister *should*, by any unlucky chance, call here in the course of their rides or drives, while staying at Greensells——”

“*At Greensells!*” reiterated Miss Brenton, aghast: for, to *her* simple comprehension, the rarely-inhabited mansion of the Marquis of Heriford was a spot scarcely less august than Windsor Castle.

“—— you will second my endeavours,” added her cousin, without noticing the interruption, “to prevent their being frightened away again by the nakedness of the land. My mother, thank God, is a gentlewoman, of whose quiet and ladylike manners and appearance no one need feel ashamed; and my father, whose highlows and corduroys, and other personal peculiarities, are certainly far from fascinating, is, fortunately, seldom at home of a morning. But think, dear Maria, what it would be to have the hall-door opened, in such an emergency, by John, in that dreadful duffle jacket, and with the hands of a blacksmith,—as he served us, in short, at breakfast! Above all, imagine what an Easton luncheon must appear to people accustomed to those of Greensells!”

“But surely those who come from the Marquis of Heriford’s to such a place as this do not expect to find exactly what they leave behind?” argued Maria.

“Neither are they entitled to expect, in a gentleman’s house, a sandwich-tray that would not be allowed to appear on any other person’s second table!” rejoined her cousin. “But the question is not what they *expect*, but what they are to find; and I count upon your kindness, Maria, to assist me to the utmost in parrying so frightful a show-up.”

Maria Brenton promised, and again received a shallow compliment on her good nature.

“Nothing but the dread of all they might discover if they came here during my absence,” said he, “determined me to undergo the martyrdom of a visit to my father during harvest time. But it was necessary to make a few prepara-

tions. It was necessary to prepare the way. So here I am," continued he, with a self-sufficient smile, as if demanding a compliment on his prudence.

"But surely," pleaded Maria, again with more logic than was altogether satisfactory to her cousin—"surely there is no great probability that visitors staying with Lord Heriford, who never takes notice of my unele except during the county elections, should suddenly cross the country to Easton, where there is nothing to be seen?"

Charles Barrington looked earnestly into the inquiring face turned towards him, before he attempted to reply; perhaps to ascertain whether Maria's question was a *bonâ fide* one; perhaps to satisfy himself how far she was to be trusted.

"Maitland is an old acquaintance of mine," said he at length; "and I have seen a great deal lately of his sister. It is but natural, therefore, that, knowing our family place to be within a few miles' distance, they should make some excuse or other for coming over to see what we are like."

The words "family-place," applied to so small a residence as Easton Hoo, might have induced a less guileless girl than Maria to suspect that her cousin had been talking somewhat over-largely, in London, of his future possessions. But the *real* family place of the Barringtons, Hexholm Manor, an ancient seat upon the Tees, having, thanks to the follies of its present representative, passed into the hands of strangers,—so far from surmising that her cousin had been unduly magnifying his consequence, she felt only for his mortification at having to exhibit so poor an establishment to his friends.

To her, indeed, it appeared almost impossible that persons honoured with the friendship and preference of Charles Barrington should care for his being landless or houseless; and when, after signifying that the Marquis and Marchioness of Heriford would be "down" in a day or two, and the large party they were expecting arrive in the course of the ensuing week, he again alluded to the cracked china and shabby decanters that usually figured on his father's table, Maria could not forbear reverting, with a faint smile, to the Lenten entertainment of the Master of Ravenswood.

"You must persuade this beautiful Miss Maitland," said she, "to be as indulgent as Lucy Ashton."

For a moment, the brow of her cousin became clouded. Accustomed to the *persiflage* of fashionable society, he suspected that he was laughed at; and Maria was forced to defend herself from an imputation which appeared to her very much like a charge of high treason.

"Yet you cannot but perceive," said he, "that this cursed mousetrap of ours,—a farmhouse in all but comfort,—is somewhat different from the picturesque dignities of Wolfscrag. To me, the Hoo is a source of such unfeigned disgust, that I often regret it does not lie near some manufacturing town, to run a chance of being burnt by the Chartists!"

He failed, however, in inducing Maria to join in abuse of Easton. "She had been too happy there,—she had received too much kindness from her aunt,—to find fault with the place."

Conscious of the limited extent of the kindness for which she was thus grateful, Charles Barrington experienced a passing qualm of conscience at his own want of sensibility.

"What I want you to do for me, Maria," resumed he, after producing considerable confusion in her task by officious attempts to afford her assistance, "is, that you will offer, as a present from yourself to my mother, a few things I have ordered down from town, which the squire would be furious if he thought me extravagant enough to have purchased."

"But will he be less angry with *me*?" inquired Miss Brenton. "My uncle knows the exact amount of means at my disposal (not a sixth part of yours!), and you saw how much he was displeased last night at my having even a wax-candle in my possession."

"Positively, my father grows more and more curmudgeonly and more morose every day!" cried Charles, shrugging his shoulders. "There is no living with him! Every trace of a gentleman is becoming effaced from his nature; he who was once, they say, one of the best dressed and most fashionable men about town!"

"Extremes meet, you know. My uncle is making atonement for early extravagance. Some day or other, *you* may, perhaps, feel inclined to do the same."

"If I were only secure of the *means* of 'early extravagance,' I would be content to take my chance," retorted

Charles. "My years of peace and plenty are drawing fast to a close; and should my mother adhere to her unkind determination not to apply for an extension of my uncle's allowance, by Jove, I shall have nothing left for it but to go and fight against the Bedoweens, or throw myself into La Trappe!"

"But on what plea *could* she ask for it?" quietly remonstrated his cousin. "The allowance was expressly granted to secure you an education such as would enable you to work your way to independence; and, from all I have heard of my uncle Humphrey, I should think him very unlikely to part with his money except on sufficient grounds."

"And what better grounds would you have," interrupted Charles, with indignation, "than redeeming his only nephew from leading the life of a snob? Of what use the excellent connexions I have formed, if I am to bury myself in chambers for the next twenty years, with an occasional excursion to Easton, by way of recreation?"

"As you did not form those connexions by his wish or desire—" Miss Brenton was beginning.—

"My dear Maria," interrupted her cousin, "spare me the rehearsal of next Sunday's afternoon sermon! I am aware that you dined yesterday at the vicarage. But if you want me to consider you the same kind, serviceable little cousin I have always found you, give me your helping-hand, without adding a touch of the pulpit. Had I wanted a lecture, I would have consulted my mother."

Maria looked up from her task and smiled, as she was expected to do; and having ascertained that the presents, of which she was required to pass for the donatrix, consisted of a pretty luncheon service of china and glass, of no alarming cost, she agreed to allow her uncle to be misled (her uncle, who, right or wrong, found something to blame in her actions), provided no deceit were practised on his mother.

"We have no right to deceive *her*,—we have no right to distrust *her*!" said Miss Brenton.

"Still, just *now*," hesitated the less candid Charles, "when I am about to persuade her to write to Madras, anything like extravagance on my part might dispose her against the commission."

"My aunt is not easily disposed against a wish or project

of yours," replied Maria, frankly. "Better rely implicitly on her affection."

And, on finding that no co-operation was to be expected, unless his mother were taken into their counsels, the deceiver was forced to comply.

As Maria had anticipated, a few gentle words of reprehension from Mrs. Barrington sufficed to express her sense of annoyance at the threatened visit. From her son's preparations, she inferred that the riding party from Greensells to Easton was a preconcerted thing; and was vexed, that, in the levity of his heart, he should have exposed her to the mortification of contact with an order of society from which she had receded from the moment the exposure of her husband's distresses rendered it impossible to maintain among them a becoming independence of position.

Of noble descent, a slight tincture of the pride which had been the original sin of her gentle nature still rendered her sensitive to the vexation of being looked down upon by those of whom she felt herself the equal.

Her quiet lesson at an end, however, and her promise given to assist in making the best of an untoward business, the thing that struck her most was the earnest kindness with which Maria hastened, under Charles's directions, to set the house in order; obtaining assistance, without her uncle's knowledge, for the flower-garden, which in harvest time was apt to be neglected; and lending her own aid in arranging the flower beds near the house, and bringing with her own hands the choicest plants from the little green-house to ornament the porch, while the gravel walks were creaking under the roller, and the mower stood whetting his scythe.

All this passed unobserved of Charles, who lay sleeping the sleep of the sluggard, while his more active cousin was astir in the morning dew. During his visits to the Hoo, indeed, she was accustomed to forestal her usual hour of rising; that she might enjoy her customary morning round of her favourite shrubberies, without danger of meeting him in her wanderings, so as to incur her uncle's displeasure. Reared in the country, having scarcely quitted Easton for a day since she entered her fifteenth year, Maria's attachment to the spot was greater than to her birth-place. She knew every tree, every plant, every green thing within the

boundaries of the place. The dogs and horses were as familiar friends; the cottages and hovels, objects of interest. The changes wrought by the seasons upon those simple objects afforded the sole incidents of her life; as a severe reprimand from her uncle, or the blooming of one of her favourite plants, constituted its light and shade.

A nature originally harmless, and thus wholesomely nourished, affords no ground for the growth of evil thoughts or graceless feelings; and the kindness and generosity with which she endeavoured to accomplish her cousin Charles's wishes, in order to welcome to his father's roof a person who, her jealous consciousness apprized her, was in possession of the shallow heart in whose mere shadow she would have been content to live, was little short of angelic.

Easton Hoo, the home so loved by Maria, and so disparagingly thought of by Charles, was, nevertheless, a spot which strangers seldom visited without interest. To those who had nothing to apprehend from the draughts of wintry wind that swept the house through the ill-fitting casements of its many-gabled frontage, there was something picturesque and striking in the aspect of the old place; which, after falling from its high estate of manor-house into a farm, and sufficing for that purpose so long as the Barringtons kept possession of their grander residence at Hexholm, had been promoted anew, after their downfall, to the honours of a gentleman's residence.

But the mere re-painting and re-paperying of the house, though sufficient to impart an air of cleanliness to the dilapidated walls, had done nothing towards its reparation. The rain penetrated into all the upper bed-rooms; and, though the high oaken mantel-pieces of the sitting-rooms had been re-varnished, the wind howled not the less fearfully at Christmas in their huge chimneys. The unsightly floors of the inhabited rooms were concealed, indeed, by shabby carpets; but the creaking, crooked staircases exhibited their grim and worm-eaten texture; and the long passages, of varying level, their damp and mildewed walls. While serving as a farmer's granary, the grange had become infested with rats and mice; and in the mouldering wainscot of the bedrooms, the death-watch kept up a perpetual clicking, till its monotony lost the evil influence of an

omen. The house was, in short, such as a thriving landlord razes to the ground as untenable, and is called a Goth for his pains, by all who ever took pencil in hand or a page of poetry to their heart.

In the estimation of the young squire, the sort of musty atmosphere that prevails in such outworn tenements was not more incompatible with the perfumes exhaling from his dressingbox, than the customs of his father's house with his habits of life. His ambitions were unluckily formed on a scale as little suited to the moderate scale of his future fortunes, as to the still narrower frame of his father's domestic economy. The rare flowers, reared with such care and difficulty by his cousin, found no favour in *his* sight, because they had not sprung as if spontaneously to perfection, under the invisible art of a head gardener; and when, after all poor Maria's sun-burnings and heartaches, the place had been put in complete order to welcome his friends, swept and garnished and watered, and adorned with all the blossoms her parterres could afford, till it looked as if got up for a honeymoon, or to sit for its portrait as the vignette of a fashionable annual, all that Charles could find to say in compensation of her cares was,—“What on earth will Maitland and his sister think of such a wretched old rathole! Rather live in the poorest London lodging for the remainder of my days, than reside in such a kill-joy of a place.”

Poor Maria was sorely disappointed. She had expected something better. She had expected something kinder. But she trusted the tears in her eyes were not very apparent when she sat down to her sewing. Her hands trembled, indeed, almost too much to work, from the heavy loads she had been lifting. But as her cousin voted it too hot to go out without risk of a *coup de soleil*, and complained bitterly of having been left alone, with nothing and no one to amuse him, while she was fulfilling the tasks undertaken for his good pleasure, she had no choice but to pretend to find occupation with her needle, while gratifying the idle man by answers to his purposeless questions, or questions to which he deigned to offer no reply.

Blind as she was to the faults of one whom she loved as the nearest and dearest thing that remained for her to love,

—whom she loved, because, where once that feeling has taken root from childhood, we cease to argue with ourselves concerning the merits of its object,—whom she loved, because she would as soon have thought of questioning the mercy of Providence, as the goodness of the son of her kind aunt,—blind as she was to his faults, it struck Maria as a *little* strange that Charles should have derived so little advantage from his season in town. In reply to her inquiries about the great men to whom he had probably sought an introduction,—the political circles to which he must have obtained access,—the excellent music he must have heard,—the fine pictures he must have seen, it startled her to be told, that “all that sort of thing was a bore!” and that “people went to the opera to talk, and to exhibitions to show themselves.”

To be otherwise than mortified at finding him thus flighty, was impossible. But nothing was easier than to attribute his being “a little spoiled” to the flattery of the world. And whatever his defects, he was still her childhood’s companion, her dear, handsome, clever cousin; whose letters, during his absence, were looked for with such a throbbing heart by his idolizing mother; the only person of her own age who had ever fallen within reach of the sympathies of her kindly nature. “*On s’attache par ses bienfaits,*” says a discerning French writer; and so many a long year had she done him cousinly service, and taken his faults and their evil consequences upon herself, that she could not leave off loving him because he was less worthy than she could desire.

“For goodness’ sake, Maria, contrive to have fresh muslin curtains up in the drawing-room to-morrow. The new ones have been in the house since yesterday, and might surely have been finished by this time,” was an injunction which she accepted as a proof of his favour and confidence; and when he reproached her that a table-cover which she had sat up the greater part of the two last nights to complete, could not be available for a day or two, tears stood in her eyes that she had not been more diligent.

Could she have surmised, indeed, that her cousin would return home intent only upon the embellishment of Easton, no exertion should have been spared to second his wishes. But she was accustomed to find the aspect of the place un-

cared for, as her own;—an object of interest to no mortal breathing, except for the use and service to which it could be converted; and to be obliged to expend all her little coquetries of adornment upon what, in *her* eyes, possessed so much intrinsic charm, merely that a stranger might not find it *too* disgusting, taxed to the utmost her untirable self-devotion.

Fortunately for Maria, her uncle's attention was so absorbed by his harvest, that the transposition of the old Chelsea vases from the china closet, and the renewal of the covers of his arm-chairs, excited no notice. It was not till the embroidered table-cover made its appearance that he was suddenly tempted to exclaim,—

“Who in the world has been taking so much trouble to make the house uncomfortable? I hate gimcrack rooms! It is one of the comforts of living out of the way of fine people, that one is able to have chairs and tables for use, and not for show. The Chalkneys, of Pountney Hill, are afraid to light a fire in their polished steel grate. Mine, thank Heaven, can have a kettle boiled on it, and none the worse!”

While his son turned away, ineffably disgusted, Maria was prematurely congratulating herself on having escaped a reprimand.

“What can have become of the green baize belonging to the round table?” continued he; “and *who* took the liberty of putting that stupid piece of patchwork in its place?”

“It is Maria's work,” interrupted his son, “and beautifully done. My friend, Lord Henry, brought some Greek caps and tobacco pouches from Constantinople, embroidered in the same style, but not half so neatly.”

“Smoking caps and tobacco pouches!” reiterated Mr. Barrington, affecting to whistle. “In that case, you can't do better than take the red rag off the table yonder, and convert it to the same important use; for it shan't stay here, I promise you, making the curtains and carpets look shabby!”

“They do not look *very* shabby, considering they have been more than ten years in constant use,” said his wife, as if it were the furniture he was attacking.

"If they have done well enough for us for ten years past, they are likely enough to do so for ten years to come!" was his peevish retort. "I have difficulty enough in making two ends meet, madam, without taxing myself to new furnish Easton. My house is quite good enough for people of my modest means. If Miss Brenton has a taste for grander doings, I trust Mr. Cornbury's establishment will prove more satisfactory."

Maria coloured to the roots of her hair, but said not a word.

"I am only afraid," continued he, "that she may find it difficult to gratify her extravagant fancies out of an income which, even if the whole of it instead of half, had been claimed, as it ought to have been for her maintenance, would have been wholly inadequate to her cost."

"Miss Brenton was kind enough to place that handsome cover on the table," interrupted his son, conscious of his own unfairness in sitting by to hear the poor girl thus cruelly attacked, "in order to do honour to some fine engravings I have brought down with me, and which I was afraid of hazarding on the old baize."

"Engravings?"—sneered his father. "You are setting up for a *dilettante*, then, among other fooleries? As no one knows better than I do the cost of such a pretension, Charles (particularly when, as in your case, attended with complete ignorance of the arts——)"

"My dear father, believe me, I have not the smallest pretension of the kind," interrupted his son, dealing tenderly with a temper of which the storms were not to be trifled with. "The prints in question, which are after the Heriford collection, were presented to me by the marchioness."

"If they are of any value, why not have them bound up?" inquired Mr. Barrington, somewhat mollified. "Engravings left to lie about are sure to get damaged."

"They appeared in numbers, of which a few still remain unpublished. I am keeping them till the set is complete," said Charles.

"So that if my lady takes a fit of caprice, and sends you to Coventry, in order to assign any value to the set, you will have to throw away Heaven knows how much money, to purchase the remainder?"

"I am not afraid that Lady Heriford will grudge me one of the many sets for which she was forced to subscribe," persisted Charles, with a smile.

"Out of sight, out of mind!—The Herifords are the most whimsical people in the world. Notwithstanding the fine property they possess in this county, they have not set foot in it these five years."

"Nearer six," added Mrs. Barrington, in a low voice.

"Six, is it? I don't exactly recollect. I suppose I am not called upon to swear to the comings and goings of people, who, in the little I had to do with them, treated me with the basest ingratitude!"

Impossible for Maria to repress a glance of sympathy towards her cousin; but Charles was a man of expedients, and not easily cast down.

"Perhaps, sir," said he, addressing his father more respectfully than was his wont, "the marquis may have become alive to his fault; for nothing can exceed the kindness with which I have been recently received by the family."

"No doubt! A general election is coming on. His lordship has suddenly called to mind, not only that there exists such a county as Buckinghamshire, but that the land-owners, snobs though they be, may as well be conciliated."

"Lord Heriford never mentioned yours or my mother's name to me except with the utmost respect," said Charles, in an extenuating tone.

"I should think not,—as he would otherwise, I trust, have incurred the risk of a hard blow in return for his hard word. But it is not the less sure that he despises *me* as much as I dislike *him*. Not much consequence to either, considering how far our orbits lie asunder!"

"Still, now that there are young people in both families," argued his son, "there exists the greater chance of contact, and——"

"Contact?—Not by *my* act or deed, I promise you!" cried Mr. Barrington, growing still more angry on finding his son assert an opinion of his own. "No mortal power would get me across the threshold of Greensells; and there is luckily small chance that Lord Heriford will take it into his head to cross mine; for you may depend upon it I should spare no pains to prevent his repeating the visit."

Somewhat alarmed by this threat, the young man muttered a few incoherent phrases about the "forms of society," and "old English hospitality."

"I am somewhat too old a bird, Charles Barrington, to be caught by claptrap!" sneered his father in reply. "Old English hospitality carries a good sound. But I will thank you to tell me how many grains of it enter into the intercourse between a peer of the realm with a place at court and thirty thousand a year, and such of his shabby country neighbours as cannot assist him in preserving his game or outlawing his poor? I am a brokendown man, Charles; a man who but for the help of others, could not have afforded you the education of a gentleman; a man who has a hard matter to shuffle through the year and look his Christmas bills in the face. But I have just sense enough to know that one so situated, can't keep too far out of the way of a grandee like Lord Heriford. I cut my coat according to my cloth; and it needs no conjuror to discover that my cloth will not bear measuring by the ell of a marquis."

The London dandy all but groaned at this matter-of-fact exposition of the case. He hazarded, however, one more attempt to mollify his father.

"Nothing can be more just than your theory, sir," said he, "but you have a little misconceived the character of the Herifords. Their house is one of the pleasantest in London;—open to people of all parties,—of all conditions."

"London!" interrupted the irritable father: "*who* talks about London?—What has London to do with it?—In London, people are accepted as what they pretend to be. In London, people are judged by the surface. His lordship saw in *you*, for instance, a fine-spoken, mealy-mouthed chap, as well dressed as his own sons,"—(In spite of his anxieties, Charles Barrington, recalling to mind the person of the Earl of Clandon, could not refrain from a supercilious smile.)—"educated at the same school, the same college; and, having too much on his hands of higher interest to be at the trouble of calculating how much a year less than your grandfather you were likely to inherit at my death, admitted you into his titled mob. But at Greensells the

case is different. *There*, the old aristocrat will be at leisure to consider your claims to become his guest; or rather how much dirt he has a right to cram down your throat with every dinner he gives you!"

Charles Barrington's face flushed crimson. It was difficult to bear this, even from his father.

"Understand, therefore, once and for all," continued the fractious man, perceiving that he was silenced, "that the sooner you break off this foolish acquaintance the better; and that all the copies of the Heriford gallery extant, will not purchase my vote and interest for the county of Bucks."

CHAPTER IV.

Loves she? She loves *not*!—*She* hath never loved.
 Her walk is easy,—her discourse is neat:
 She sigheth not,—her smile hath mirth in it.
 Her gaze is firm, untroubled, cloudless, cold,
 No fear makes pale her cheek. No hopeless pain
 Lies there,—nor hope, half-hidden. No sweet trouble
 Stains it with beauty, like the rose's leaf.—PROCTOR.

"SURELY, Charles," faltered Miss Brenton, when she recovered her breath after the concussion produced by her uncle's slamming the door, when at the close of his peroration he quitted the room,—a concussion that served to set the dust in motion from all the crevices of the old wainscoting, and caused all the furniture in the room to jar,—"*surely* it would have been better to tell him the whole truth, at once!"

"In order to drive him into a fit of passion that must have produced some odious extremity?"—

"My uncle cannot be more determined than he *is*. Perhaps if he found the visit you anticipate a settled thing, the startle of such an event might bring him to reason. At all events he would be prepared to offer a proper welcome to your friends. Believe me, perfect openness is always the best."

"With perfectly open people. But it does not do to ex-

pose one's palm to those whose fists are as close as wax. No, no, Maria! I must act in this instance, with my father, as I always do; keep my game to myself, and finesse for the odd trick. But you quite mistake me in fancying that I have the smallest desire to *promote* the visit in question. I only wish to be on the spot that I may be able to palliate the evil."

Maria was puzzled. If she did not approve the use of subterfuges between father and son, still less did she understand the advantage of manœuvring with the friends of his choice, or the object of his affections; and lucky was it perhaps for her candour that Mrs. Barrington, who had followed her usual practice of retreat when she saw her husband's temper on edge, at this moment re-entered the room.

A glance from Charles towards Miss Brenton implied that the subject was sacred. Even his mother was not to be fully admitted into the mystery of his connexion with Greensells!

It was perhaps to divert her attention from the forbidden topic, that Charles Barrington, for the first time since his arrival at home, began to talk of London otherwise than in relation to his selfish pleasures; and from the nature of her aunt's inquiries concerning persons and things, Maria was astonished to perceive how large a share Mrs. Barrington had formerly taken in the pleasures of the metropolis. So complete was the self-adaptation of the excellent wife to her altered fortunes,—so thoroughly had she appeared to efface from her mind all memory of more prosperous days,—that it was only from her careless inquiry concerning the present tenant of a certain box at the Opera, with which she interrupted her son's account of the brilliancy of one of the royal visits, that Charles was apprized of its having been once her own.

"Did you see much of the Coylsfields?" said she, when her son was describing the difficulty of reconciling the dinner-parties of the fashionable world with the riding-hour of the park.

"Not so much as they seemed to wish; for Lord Coylsfield, in spite of his parliamentary duties, which have been pretty urgent this session, called upon me several times. They do not see much company, I fancy; but I was twice asked to dinner."

"You *did* dine with them, then?"

"No; his invitations were for Saturdays, when there are always pleasanter engagements in hand than a humdrum party with people like the Coylsfields; where one meets a set of long-headed, long-winded quizzers, who expect one to sit out dessert and coffee, listening to their *ex-cathedra* debating, instead of getting off to the Opera."

"I am sorry you refused, however," said Mrs. Barrington; "for in my letter I made their attentions to you during your stay in town an important object."

"Your *letter!*—*What* letter? You gave me no letter to them. You only desired me to leave a card in St. James's Square, as at twenty other houses."

"I wrote previously to Lady Coylsfield to introduce you to her kindness."

"And why not give me the letter to deliver in person? I could then have ascertained whether Lady Alicia de Capell's account were correct, that the Coylsfields are the slowest coaches on the road!" said Charles, betraying the origin of his remissness in St. James's Square.

"Your father might have been displeased at my appearing to solicit a renewal of their kindness."

"By the way, I now remember your telling me that the Coylsfields were people you had long lost sight of."

"As my trustee, Lord Coylsfield had some sort of misunderstanding with your father, at the time of his difficulties."

"Trustee of your settlements? Why, you must have known him intimately! You must have known him, my dear mother, previous to your marriage."

"I thought you were aware of his being my cousin," replied Mrs. Barrington, in a low voice. "Your father is not fond of having the connexion alluded to."

"Because it happens to be the only one we possess that does us honour, or is calculated to do me service!" said Charles, with acrimony.

"Because Mr. Barrington considers it at variance with our altered habits of life."

"As if relationship had a right to cavil at habits of any kind. But surely, mother, *you* might have explained all this to me previous to my visit to town."

"I was uncertain how my overtures of reconciliation

would be received. Lady Coylsfield did not answer my letter; and I was willing to spare you the mortification that might possibly arise from being disowned by such near relations."

"By which reserve, I have lost every advantage that was to be derived from their notice! But what is their exact degree of relationship?" demanded Charles, pushing, in his eagerness, his arm-chair closer to the work-table where the two ladies were sitting. "*Your* maiden name was Tarleton, mother, and Lord Coylsfield's, if I remember, is Mervyn?"

"My mother's name was Mervyn. My mother was only daughter to the fourth lord."

"The *Honourable* Mrs. Tarleton, then?" cried Charles, with brightened and brightening countenance.

"The Honourable Mrs. Tarleton. But she died so young, that I scarcely remember her; and my father soon married again."

"Yes, the admiral's second choice is unluckily still extant, to attest its badness; for I believe you come in for something considerable when her jointure falls in?"

"Four hundred a year. But Mrs. Tarleton is only ten years older than myself."

"Lord Coylsfield, then, is literally your first cousin!" resumed Charles. "And with such good blood in your veins, you have actually gone on, submitting to take the lowest place among the vulgar squires' wives of this odious neighbourhood——"

"My mother's rank entitled *me* to no precedence," replied Mrs. Barrington; "and among persons of *our* class, my dear Charles, how little difference exists between the first place and the last! But let me beg of you to make no allusion to the Coylsfields in presence of your father. He never liked them, and would be irritated at the idea that you attached much importance to the connexion."

As she sat silently over her work, Maria could not forbear a heavy sigh at hearing of further necessity for family dissimulation. It was not the least of the evils arising from her uncle's morose temper, that he deteriorated the sincerity of all who approached him.

The lapse of a few days afforded new grounds of vexation. Her cousin, who by way of rewarding their ready compliance

with his projects, was at unusual pains to render himself agreeable; proposing evening walks to his mother, or reading to them, while they sat at work in the heat of the day, the few new books he had brought down from town, gradually relaxed in his attentions. Not designedly. He evidently did not intend to be less civil; but he was growing too uneasy within himself to take heed of the comfort of others.

From the date of the arrival of the Heriford family at Greensells, or rather from that of the arrival of their expected guests, his ears and eyes became constantly on the alert. When the hour for the cross-post passed without bringing letters, the flush of terror with which he had been watching for its arrival subsided in a moment, to leave him listless for the remainder of the day. Every unusual sound in the house startled and displeased him; and more than once, the ringing of the cracked old door-bell caused him to turn as pale as death. If they should after all discover his being in the country! If they should come at last! Even his father's sneers at the indolence of London fine gentlemen did not rouse him to habits of exertion. Morning after morning, even when the weather was cool and inviting, was idled away at home. He seemed afraid of quitting the house till all chance of visitors was over; or, at the utmost, strolled along a green lane which formed the ridgeway of a hill predominating over the Hoo, and commanding a view of the high-road, so that no one could approach unnoticed.

"Charles is getting lazier than ever," was Mr. Barrington's bitter comment on all this to his wife. "I never saw a more complete sluggard. How he is ever to attain the active habits of a professional man, would be hard to say. Half his inertness, however, may be laid at Maria's door. The mean obsequiousness with which she does his errands, and the cunning with which she keeps him dawdling after her while she pretends to sit stitching, as though for her daily bread, is truly offensive."

"Surely there is no object just now to entice him out in the heat of the day?" pleaded his mother. "This is the first time Charles has been at Easton since he grew up, at a season when there was no sporting to occupy his mornings."

"Which you think a sufficient reason for devoting them

to that languishing girl! But as I don't happen to be of your opinion, madam, I will thank you to tell her that so long as her cousin is lounging about the house, her own room is the fittest place to spend the afternoon. She has tricked it out fine enough for a princess, and so much cost and trouble should not be thrown away."

The hint to this effect, which was given with a varying complexion and tremulous voice by her aunt, was in fact a relief to Miss Brenton.—Of her own accord she would not have presumed to withdraw herself from Charles's society, so long as he seemed in want of companionship. But it was a comfort to be privileged to abjure the sight of his restless movements, and escape his fretful injustice. Originating in any other cause, it would have been borne with her usual submission. But it was hard to see him thus stimulated from his customary apathy, only because dreading the arrival of Miss Maitland.

One showery afternoon, however, which in spite of divers messages from her cousin she had persisted in passing in her own room, the sudden appearance of a rainbow having afforded enfranchisement to all parties, she saw from her window her uncle shuffle in clogs into his farm-yard, which was in the rear of the house; and a few minutes afterwards, the gentle voice of Mrs. Barrington announced that she and Charles were going to walk as far as the vicarage.

"Your cousin has not called on the Forsyths since he arrived," said she. And Maria, who understood all this to indicate that she was no longer a prisoner, and might come and enjoy her books and work in the drawing-room, was thankful for the attention.

As she descended the creaking old staircase, the delicious summer breeze, which, after so close a morning, the hall-door had been left open to admit, so refreshed her senses, that for a moment she stood transfixed within the porch, feasting her eyes upon the grass, still glittering with a thousand raindrops, and inhaling the fragrance of the jessamine that nearly covered the garden front of the house; while the warbling of a thousand birds seemed to harbingering the return of fine weather. The weariness of her young heart gave way at once before the pleasantness of the hour. Blue skies above and sunshine on the earth sufficed at any moment to

make her forget that human beings could be selfish, or cousins unkind.

On entering the drawing-room, she set about her usual tasks with unusual glee;—carefully removed the snippings from under her aunt's work-table, watered a favourite fuchsia that stood in the embayment of the old window, and replaced on the book-shelf the volume which Charles had been reading to his mother; not, perhaps, without glancing at the passage in Crabbe's Tales, where his mark announced him to have left off.

So engrossed was she in her good offices, that it was not till a scuffling of feet in the hall, and the coarse voice of the country footman responding to some person unknown, announced the door-bell to have been rung,—that she was aware of visitors being at hand.

“Is Mr. Barrington at home?” was a question naturally answered by the intelligence that, though not at home, “he could be fetched in a minnit, being only in the fairm yaird.”

“What shall we do?” demanded the unseen visitor to his companion or companions. “Dismount, or return?”

“Return? after all the trouble we have taken, and without so much as a glass of sherry to prevent our catching cold after being wet to the skin?” cried the individual addressed.

And before Maria had time to take cognizance of the strangers from the drawing-room window, she heard orders to fetch Mr. Barrington issued in a somewhat peremptory tone to the footman; who, previous to going in search of his master, threw open the drawing-room door, just in time to exhibit her still standing beside the fuchsia, with a decanter of water in her hand, to two ladies in riding habits, who entered the room with laughing self-possession. Their sole escort was a dull, surly-looking young man, who, till he caught sight of her, did not remove his hat from his head.

No mistaking the dreaded party from Greensells. Already, Miss Brenton, understanding for whom the visit was intended, was about to apologize for her cousin's absence, and propose sending for him to the vicarage, in case his friends could wait for his return, when the least well-looking of the

young ladies advanced graciously towards her with explanations of her own.

"I know not how to apologize for this intrusion," said she, with highbred *sang froid*, "unless by announcing myself as a delegate from my mother, Lady Heriford, to Mrs. Barrington, with whom she had formerly the pleasure of being acquainted, and whom we hoped to find at home. I conclude I am addressing her daughter?"

"Her niece," replied Maria, with an embarrassed blush, not from finding herself for the first time in company with great ladies, but because, sympathising in the vexation of her cousin Charles at finding his anticipations so disagreeably verified.

While her guests were accepting the seats she hastened to offer, she was able to steal a glance at the Eleanor Maitland of whose charms she had directly and indirectly heard so much. But the mirth that brightened the young lady's face was so manifestly of a satirical nature, that it was difficult to find more to applaud than the brilliancy of her complexion, and deep azure of her eyes.

As to the cavalier by whom they were accompanied, and whom, on hearing him addressed by one or other of his fair companions, as "brother," she concluded to be Sir Wolsley Maitland, he took neither part in their conversation nor share in their movements: no uncommon thing with young Englishmen, who pretend to excuse their dullness in a morning visit, by calling themselves shy.

A more practised eye than that of Maria might have detected the contemptuous nature of the glances exchanged between the ladies after a scrutinizing examination of the objects around them, while listening to her kindly expressions of a hope that they had found shelter from the recent showers, on their way across the country. But, on hospitable thoughts intent, and wholly occupied by her previous promises to her cousin, her mind was harassed between the desire to offer the refreshment of which she had heard her guests announce themselves in need; and the dread lest, as she could not, with propriety, leave them, to superintend the preparations for luncheon, something should be presented calculated to offend the nicety of Charles and his friends.

But for the dread of her uncle's threatened incivility, she would have almost longed for his arrival, to set her at liberty. Meanwhile, she was forced to listen to Lady Alicia de Capell's expression of the marchioness's wish, that, as the stay of the family at Greensells was to be so short, Mr. and Mrs. Barrington would dispense with the ceremony of a mutual exchange of morning visits, and dine and sleep at Greensells, with their son, the following day.

Before Maria had stammered her acknowledgments for the graciousness with which Lady Alicia added, that her mother was at present unaware of their good fortune in the hope of so agreeable an addition to their party, Mr. Barrington, hot and discomposed, shuffled into the room, to make his uncouth bow to the silent young man, and listen to a repetition of the invitation.

"My servant having understood that Sir Wolseley Maitland and his friends had waited upon me rather than my son, unluckily brought him in search of me to the stable-yard," said he. Then, referring the question to the decision of his wife, as plausibly as though she had a voice in any matter in which he was concerned, "but being bent upon seeing Charles," added he, "Sir Wolseley has gone on as far as the vicarage, and Mrs. Barrington will doubtless accompany them back, and answer for herself."

Never before had poor Maria seen her uncle so deferential. Instead of the rudeness he had all but threatened, his address was that of Barrington of Hexholm, rather than of Barrington of the Hoo. And yet, in the eyes of the two fair visitors, his overheated face, drooping and discoloured shirt collar, and dirty plaid jacket, afforded no indication that he had ever been more than a petty squire, who deserved the stocks for wiping his forehead with a coloured cotton handkerchief, while addressing one of the finest ladies in the land.

Poor Charles! The worst he had anticipated was come to pass. The naked truth of Easton lay bare, in all its unsightliness, before the fastidious eyes of Miss Maitland; and Maria could almost have counted the moments by the throbbing in her temples, while anxiously awaiting the first indication of her cousin's return, to enable her to escape from the sight of his distress.

It was by the gentle well-bred Mrs. Barrington, however, who preceded her son, that the happy change was effected which converted the awkward group into a sociable circle. With the good breeding which naturally emanates from good sense and good nature, Mrs. Barrington introduced herself to her young guests; and provided so promptly for their comfort and refreshment, that so far from persisting in their consciousness of flighty superiority, both Lady Alicia and Miss Maitland were induced to exert themselves to conciliate the simply-dressed, but ladylike woman, who was doing the honours of a house so much beneath their expectations, of Charles Barrington's "family place." Accepting her offers with thanks, Lady Alicia endeavoured to obtain in return her acceptance of the olive branch extended by her parents.

But, alas! the cheerfulness of their pleasing hostess subsided the moment a project of any kind was submitted to her decision. The smiles faded from her face, as she was under the necessity of submitting the matter to Mr. Barrington.

Lady Alicia, however, was now sufficiently interested, both in the wife and cousin of their London friend, to desire in earnest, and for *their* sakes, a visit, previously projected in the family with the view of obtaining some insight into the connexions of Eleanor Maitland's favourite partner. Turning towards the moist, cross squire, who had instinctively resumed his domestic face of opposition the moment Mrs. Barrington entered the room, she renewed the invitations to *him* in terms so nearly amounting to blandishment, that refusal was impossible.

To Maria's amazement, all was soon settled. They were to go. They were to reach Greensells for dressing time the following day. Lady Alicia hinted something about a project for fishing next morning, one of the extensive ponds which constituted the characterising feature of the place. But, in answer to this, Mr. Barrington cited the important fact, that it was market-day at Aylesbury; an event to which he seemed to think even marquises must be amenable.

The explanation had hardly ended, and Mrs. Barrington was doing the shamefaced honours of a tray, containing a

plate of sandwiches, another of very stale biscuits, with a modest allotment of strawberries, pats of butter, and some preserved apricots, to make out the customary

Five nothings on five plates of delft,

which completed the limits of Easton hospitality, accompanied by a bottle of Marsala, heroically labelled with its own name, lest it should be supposed to affect the *alias* of sherry; when the door was thrown open by a showy-looking young man, dressed in the extreme of fashion, though of the slang or sporting kind, who entreated Charles Barrington (by whom he was followed into the room with the air of a pointer that has received recent castigation, or a schoolboy caught birdnesting by his usher), to present him to his family; but who, so far from seeming to stand in need of introduction, was apparently disposed to do the honours of Easton to the Barringtons.

“We have been seeing the horses looked to, my dear sir,” said he, coolly addressing Mr. Barrington, whose acquaintance he had previously made. “As you were good enough to warn me that your coachman was not accustomed to deal with anything better than I saw in your stables, as soon as I found my friend Charles, we thought it better to be sure that Lady Alicia’s mare (the greatest beauty in England, if you will be at the trouble of looking at her when she comes round) was properly attended to. Your ladyship need be under no anxiety on Berengaria’s account,” continued he, in an audible aside; “I have saved her out of the hands of the Philistines.”

Lady Alicia, shamed by the pleasing manner of Mrs. Barrington out of the impertinence which she had both sanctioned and suggested as they approached the house, and detected the deficiencies of the establishment, endeavoured to silence Sir Wolseley by expressive frowns; while Charles Barrington, with lips pale from emotion, was endeavouring to engage the attention of Eleanor by inquiries touching their long ride, and the expression of his anxiety lest, her habit being wet, she should have taken cold.

But while hoping to give an absorbing turn to the conversation by assuring his gay guests that, by traversing one of Lord Heriford’s woods, described by Miss Maitland,

they had come more than three miles out of their way, having unluckily suggested that their direct road lay across Drosshill Heath, nothing could be more natural than Lady Alicia's entreaty that he would be kind enough to ride part of the way back with them, to show them the right road.

"Ay, do, Barrington!" cried Sir Wolseley, tapping him patronizingly on the shoulder. "Undertake the pilotship of the party,—there's a good fellow. I never set foot in the county before in my life (though I have occasionally whirled through it at the tail of four horses on my way to Oxford), so that I cannot pretend to expound the *carte du pays*. But to *you* it must be familiar as your glove. So bid them saddle White Surrey for you, when we order the horses. You can be back by dinner time. I suppose you don't dine much before eight?"

Lest his father should interpose an angry answer that they dined at half-past four, and that it now wanted but a quarter of an hour to their dinner time, Charles was prompt with expressions of regret that it was out of his power to have the honour of accompanying them.

"He had, at present, no horses at Easton."

The "*at present*" was luckily inaudible in the gallery; for Mr. Barrington was likely enough to have added, on such a hint, that his son had never possessed, on his own account, any four-legged thing of higher degree than a shooting-pony.

But Sir Wolseley, thus confirmed in his suspicions that the fine horses on which Charles Barrington had figured throughout the season in the park, throwing, thanks to his excellent horsemanship, greater men into the shade, were in reality hired of some horse-dealer,—had no mercy.

"No horses?" cried he. "Why, what have you done with your bay hack, Charles? And what has become of the Arabian?"

"You will readily believe that they are not within reach," replied Charles, evasively; "for you cannot doubt how rejoiced I should be to officiate as guide to your party."

"But, my dear fellow," persisted Sir Wolseley, perceiving that though Lady Alicia appeared engaged in conversation with Mrs. Barrington, not a syllable that was passing

escaped her ears; "if you have no horses, what in Heaven's name do you do with yourself in the country at this time of year? You are in no case to require training for the first of September; nor must you inflict such a shock upon our nerves, as to tell us that you have degenerated into an Izaak Walton! Even *then* you have no stream hereabouts worth mentioning; and it is too late for Stockbridge!"

"Do not exhaust your well-known ingenuity in devising sport for me," said Charles, writhing under his impertinent irony. "Believe me, I am in no want of means of amusement."

But that Maria Brenton had quitted the room on her aunt's arrival, to see even the moderate entertainment which had been set before the visitors properly sent in, Sir Wolseley would probably have discerned in her fair face an abominable explanation of the vaunt of his victim. As it was, he glanced round the meagrely-furnished rooms, where not a semblance of the lighter pastimes of life was perceptible, with a smile bitter as a north-easter.

Instead, however, of saying openly, "Then by Jupiter, you are more easily amused than most men!" he affected to discover, in the course of his scrutiny, that one of the party was wanting.

"But where's Clan?" cried he, starting from his seat. "Surely Clan came in with us?"

"Yes, I had the pleasure of presenting my brother to Mr. Barrington," replied Lady Alicia, who, till then, had not noticed his disappearance.

"Clandon is so shy," added she, as if in explanation to the lady of the house, "that he is only too apt to make his escape from a party in which ladies are included."

"Nothing more likely than that he has got on his horse, and returned home again, leaving us to find our way through the brambles and briers, which he was pleased to call the cross-road to Easton, as best we may!" cried Sir Wolseley, with affected indignation; "unless, indeed, he have crept into the house-dog's kennel, to dry himself in the straw, till our visit is over."

"If you will give me leave," said Charles Barrington, glad of any pretext to absent himself from the sight of Eleanor Maitland's face, no longer turned upon him with the beaming smile of girlish favour, but wearing a con-

strained and wondering expression, "I will go and ascertain from the servants whether Lord Clandon is really gone."

But as he was leaving the room in search of John, or the old coachman (who answered in his father's scanty establishment to the comprehensive name of "servants"), he was forestalled by the entrance of the earl,—his hat, as usual, on his head, and his hands, as usual, in his pockets.

"Why, Clan, my good, fellow!" cried Sir Wolseley, while Mr. Barrington rose awkwardly from his seat to offer it to the future representative of the illustrious house of Heriford, "what, in the name of all that is unaccountable, have you been doing with yourself? Absent in the spirit, you have long accustomed us to see you; but, on finding you absent in the body, and knowing my friend Barrington's prepossessions in favour of your brother Henry, I was afraid he might have left some draw-well uncovered, into which, like a true philosopher, you had walked with your eyes open."

To all this Lord Clandon vouchsafed no other reply than by removing his hat, on noticing the presence of the ladies; then, proceeding to the window, he began surveying, from within, the grounds through which he had, to all appearance, been sauntering.

"Better come and try a biscuit and a glass of wine, Clan, my boy!" cried Sir Wolseley; "for if I remember, you announced yourself to be starving, as we approached the house. Sandwiches, we have been of course much too wise to leave for a laggard like yourself."

"Ring the bell, Charles," said Mrs. Barrington; "they will bring more sandwiches in a moment."

Instantly advancing towards her with more courtesy than might have been expected from his boorish exterior, Lord Clandon entreated that no trouble might be given on his account.

"I have been rambling about your curious and most interesting premises," said he, "and took the liberty of requesting a crust of bread, and glass of water from one of the servants. I never take any other luncheon."

"Your lordship shows your wisdom," cried Mr. Barrington, struck with so admirable a trait of character in so young a man. "Luncheons are good for nothing but to

render people as heavy in the morning as they have no right to be before night. Luncheons spoil one's dinner and digestion!"

"You are of opinion then, my dear sir," interrupted Sir Wolseley, "that men, like dogs, digest but once in the twenty-four hours? I don't dispute it! I leave such points to the lecturers at the public hospitals. But allow me to deny your major. The solid *déjeuners à la fourchette* of the French, entitle us to doubt the stultifying powers of the luncheon. By Jove! it requires some courage to call the French a *heavy* nation."

"Or the Germans a light one; whose *mittag* and supper amount to our luncheon and dinner," observed Charles, coming to his father's assistance, only because dreading lest, having heard of the starvation of the Earl of Clandon, Mr. Barrington should propose to his noble guest a slice of the fillet of veal or leg of mutton awaiting the family dinner. For the clock having now struck the half-hour after four, fumes of roast meat pervaded the house more powerfully than was altogether pleasant in the glowing month of August.

But Lord Clandon chose to be heard in his turn. Having been forced to break the ice of his reserve, he lost his usual fear of hearing his own voice sufficiently to inquire of Mr. Barrington the supposed age of Easton Hoo.

"I saw the date of 1515 on the stone lintel of one of the outhouses. The house itself is, perhaps, still more ancient?" said he, really desirous of information.

"Only by a few years, my lord," replied his host, scarcely less embarrassed than pleased to have the question of his proprietorship canvassed. "The estate came into my family in Henry VI.'s time, by bequest from Sir Hugh de Barynton. About the beginning of the last century, the branch I represent altered the name to Barrington, and settled in Northumberland."

"As the Barringtons of Hexholm, perhaps?" said Lord Clandon, who, shy as he was, was wanting neither in information or curiosity.

"As the Barringtons of Hexholm," replied Mr. B.; not caring to add that the denomination was already lost to the family.

"But you chiefly reside here?" persisted the shy man,

whose unusual loquacity seemed to have run away with him.

“The Hexholm estate came into my family by marriage, and has passed out of it again,” replied Mr. Barrington, in whose voice a slight indication of emotion was perceptible, as he made the announcement. “We now live wholly at Easton.”

“I wonder you ever quitted it!” was Lord Clandon’s cool reply. “It is a place to be proud of. WE came into this county little more than a century ago, yet the breaking up of so many old families has already given us a certain standing. My great grandfather all but ruined himself in building Greensells, a house too damp to be lived in; and to lay the foundations pulled down an old Grange of the same order as Easton, which, no doubt, was fifty times more comfortable.”

“My neighbours are civil enough to advise me to pull down the Hoo!” observed Mr. Barrington, trying to smile.

“In our case the act was folly; in yours it would be sacrilege,” observed Lord Clandon, warming to a subject that interested his archæological tastes. “A house which has been three centuries in your family!”

“Surely it does not look as if it had been a day less!” observed Sir Wolseley Maitland, with affected *naïveté*, anxious to put an end to a conversation which was assigning an unsatisfactory degree of importance to Charles Barrington and his possessions. For, having been at the trouble of riding across the country in showery weather, at the suggestion of Lady Heriford, to decide a point which, much to his dissatisfaction, a very cursory view of the house and lands of Charles Barrington had enabled him to determine,—namely, that he was no match for his sister,—it was provoking to hear a single argument in his favour. “But now that you *have* deigned to find your way back to us, my dear Clan,” continued he, “prythee let us order the horses for our start! Should you be taken with another fit of truancy, Lady Alicia and Nell will, perhaps, have to bivouac in the woods all night, under my misguidance.”

The horses were accordingly brought round; not without renewed anguish on the part of Charles Barrington, at sight of the superannuated and meagre old coachman, in a napless

Welsh wig, who assisted the natty Greensells groom to hold them, while the ladies were mounting.

Proper compliments were exchanged on both sides. But before the riding-party was out of sight, a sigh, almost amounting to a groan, escaped the parched lips of the impostor; on whose cheeks a flush of feverish excitement certified the anguish under which he had been labouring during the visit of friends so little friendly. What a relief to see vanishing in the distance the form of one whom, in more infatuated moments, he had fancied so prepossessed in his favour, as to be capable of sacrificing for his sake the brilliant prospects awaiting her!

Alas! he was undeceived *now!* A glance, such as he had intercepted on its way from the eyes of the fair Eleanor to those of her fashionable friend, might have sufficed to extinguish the flame of Lovelace himself!

CHAPTER V.

You may rave as much as you please about purity, and porcelain ware, and virtue. But there are some women as have more of the devil, and less of the angel, in 'em, than you're thinking on—I can tell you!—SAM SLICK.

WHEN the family assembled that day round their frugal dinner-table, not one of them but appeared in unusual spirits; each being intent on concealing from the others the unpleasant impressions derived from their recent ordeal.

The master of the house felt committed in the eyes of all present by the readiness with which he had accepted the first overtures of conciliation from the long vituperated marquis. His gentle wife was annoyed at the prospect of the morrow's visit; while Charles, who was writhing under a thousand mortifications, kept secretly reviewing every word and gesture that had escaped his inopportune guests.

But the person who felt most, and said least, was Maria. Emotions, such as she regarded as too culpable for disclosure, were stirring within her; and it was difficult to prevent the tears from springing into her eyes which had

arisen out of the well-spring of her heart. Not because she had been mistaken by Lord Clandon for an upper servant, while occupied in preparing the luncheon in a housekeeper's room that was attainable from the stable-yard ;—not because the immense distance was suddenly revealed to her that divided her from the lovely and prosperous object of Charles's affections ;—not because the envied Eleanor Maitland had proved a thousand times fairer and more graceful than even his enthusiastic descriptions prepared her to expect,—but because something in the flighty manners of the beautiful equestrian, and a certain expression in the brilliant glances of her keen sea-blue eyes, filled her with anxiety for the future happiness of her cousin.

Maria could not forbear wondering whether, after Charles had joined the party with Sir Wolseley, they ventured to persist in the bantering tone of compliment on the beauties of Easton, in which they had indulged in addressing her uncle and herself.

Though thankful when, immediately after dinner, Mr. Barrington proceeded to the offices to superintend certain repairs indispensable to set his quizzical old family chariot in motion, on its way to Greensells, she dreaded being left alone with her cousin. She was afraid he might question her concerning her opinion of Miss Maitland. And when Mrs. Barrington, equally intent upon preparations for a visit so out of their usual quiet routine of country neighbourhood, also quitted the room, Maria endeavoured to steal out after her, on a similar pretence.

But Charles Barrington wanted to be listened to ; and, calling after his cousin, begged her to come and take a turn in the shrubbery, to enjoy the beautiful sunset closing that every-way stormy day. The garden-bonnet was accordingly tied on ; and the hasty strides with which her companion tried to get out of sight of the house, prepared her for a lover's raptures concerning the ivory smoothness of Miss Maitland's beautiful brow, and the airy lightness of those silken ringlets, which not even rain could uncurl. But her fears were soon set at rest. Charles Barrington's thoughts were wholly absorbed by himself.

“ Was there ever such a confounded business as this ! ” said he, throwing himself on a rustic seat that occupied one

of the windings of the shrubbery, and motioning to his companion to place herself by his side. "You know all the horrors I anticipated from the visit, Maria? Yet you see they were fifty-fold exceeded!"

"I was in hopes nothing had occurred that ought *particularly* to annoy you," replied his cousin. "They all expressed themselves delighted with the Hoo. And what could exceed the cordiality of the invitation to Greensells?"

"Delighted!—Cordiality!—My dear Maria, you know little of people of *their* class! The whole time they were in the house, they were laughing at everything and everybody it contained—Maitland openly—the others covertly."

"Then thank Heaven that I *do* know little of them," rejoined Maria, with honest warmth; "for they dissembled so well, as thoroughly to take me in."

"If by any possible management to-morrow's visit could be evaded!" mused Charles Barrington in despair. "There is no fit of illness so severe that I would not risk to get out of the scrape!"

"My uncle seems bent upon going, which I should scarcely have expected, after all his resentment against Lord Heriford," rejoined Maria. "But I suppose that, like *me*, he was deceived by the apparent sincerity of Lord Clandon's overtures."

"Clandon?—Oh! *he* was sincere enough—stupid brute! But Clandon counts for nothing at Greensells. Nobody pays the smallest attention to what *he* says or does."

"Yet, surely, he does not appear a stupid person?" argued Maria; "that is, not ignorant, not unobservant. The questions he asked about Easton were more to the purpose than all the nonsense of Sir Wolseley Maitland—and—" She paused.

"And his sister. True! But it is their *cue* to talk nonsense; whereas Clandon is a matter-of-fact person, full of information, and all that sort of thing; made for a county-member, if one could only get him canvassed for, without his knowledge; but of no more account in Lady Heriford's drawing-room, than one of the family pictures. The consequence is, that they can't bear him. The consequence is, that Henry is the favourite."

"Poor Lord Clandon! His manners are not in his

favour. But his mother is surely not the person to visit them upon him ; for they must be the result of his bringing up."

"Perhaps so. I believe, however, that some people are naturally awkward. But never mind Clandon! *He* is the last person to care for in the business. *Do* you think, Maria, that anything could be contrived to determine my father and mother against going to Greensells?"

"I fear not. You allowed your wishes on the subject to be too apparent, when my uncle spoke about the broken axle-tree. The moment he fancied you wanted to prevent his going, he became obstinately set upon the visit. After dinner, he did what I never knew him do before ; he gave a five-pound note to my aunt, and desired her to send off to Tring for anything wanting for her toilet or mine."

"A five-pound note! When five times the sum would not make either of you presentable. And finely will the rubbish you can pick up at Tring improve the matter! If Lady Heriford had only shown the civility of giving one a few days' notice, I could have got new dresses from town, both for my mother and yourself."

"How kind of you! Thank you, dear Charles. But I assure you we shall do very well. My aunt and I were forced to be unusually fine a few weeks ago, for Justina Harman's wedding."

"*Fine?*—yes; but *that* is precisely what you must *not* be at Greensells!"

"Do not be uneasy," replied Maria, with a patient smile. "My aunt's good taste ought to satisfy you that she would never do anything out of place. Besides, if you remember, you sent us our dresses from London. Depend, at all events, upon my doing my best, Charles, not to disgrace you with your friends."

"*You* mean to go then?"

"I have no choice about the matter ; you heard what my uncle said."

"Then I have a fair excuse for absenting myself and being off to town in the morning," observed Charles, "in the impossibility of going four in a chariot, but I prefer even grilling myself in the rumble, to the annoyance of having to *surmise* what passed during the visit. I must be

on the spot,—or Sir Wolseley will be drawing out my father for the amusement of the whole party!”

“It is unlucky your friend, Lord Henry De Capell, is not with his family. *He* would take care that nothing was done to annoy you.”

“Henry? Henry would be worst of all! Provided Henry de Capell finds something or somebody to laugh at, he cares very little whose feelings are wounded. Had he been of the party to-day, I should have heard of nothing but the Easton fast-day for the next ten years.”

“And to such shallow friends you give up your time and affections!” burst from the indignant lips of Maria. “The Forsyths and Harmans, whom you despise as humdrum, are not, I admit, very amusing. But, at least, they are not double-faced; and even Sir Hildebrand and Lady Chalkneys, with all their absurdities, would think it treachery to laugh at a friend.”

“Very shabby of them, considering how much laughter on the part of their friends they have to return! But it is seldom the *elders* of a family whose quizzing one has to apprehend. Lord Heriford, for instance, has quite as much good faith as old Harman or Sir Hildebrand. Lord Heriford is a solemn old prig, who never was within leagues of a joke in his life. Even Clandon, as becomes the future head of the family, is perfectly in earnest. It is the sharp-shooting of the girls, and the satirical set they always have about them, you have to dread. However, there is no remedy,—no alternative—go we must. I only recommend you, my dear Maria, to say as little as you can during the short time we remain at Greensells; and do as much as possible what you see done by other people.”

It was not likely that a person so dazzled by the superficial varnish of worldliness as Charles Barrington should perceive the impossibility of offence or vulgarity in a nature so elegant as that of his cousin; or that, in his mother's society, she could have contracted any habits but such as became the highest order of society. But even *he* was astonished—so little was he accustomed to notice Miss Brenton's appearance—when, on the assembling of the large party in the state drawing-room at Greensells the following day, before dinner, he saw every eye directed towards the

lovely girl who entered the room leaning on his mother's arm.

The four fashionable-looking daughters of the house, arrayed in the faded finery of a London season,—Eleanor Maitland, herself, over-dressed and loaded with trinkets,—to say nothing of the gaudy damsels accompanying two families of country neighbours, as fine as pink satin and lilac gauze could make them, served only as foils to one whose fresh white muslin dress, and well-braided hair, devoid of a single ornament, served to set off to greater advantage a purity of complexion and intelligence of countenance, which, at eighteen, are adornments in themselves.

An air of peculiar distinction was imparted by her simplicity of attire. Even Charles, who had not seen her before for years in evening costume, was struck by the symmetry of her figure; and could scarcely believe that the slender waist, marked out by her white satin sash, was the same he had so long disregarded in her heavy, ill-fitting morning dress. The glow imparted to her face by the excitement arising from the innumerable objects of interest collected around her, rendered her scarcely recognizable to those who, on their visit to Easton, had decided her to be a pleasing girl, but "*tant soit peu pécore.*"

But the person most startled by Miss Brenton's appearance was Lord Clandon. Seated opposite to her at table, by the side of a disagreeable Lady Ironsides, who, by virtue of her husband's fine park in the neighbourhood, he had been obliged to take in to dinner, he could scarcely recover his amazement at finding the civil modest young person to whom, mistaking her at Easton for Lady Barrington's house-keeper, he had applied for a crust of bread, a guest in his father's house. But whereas other people are struck dumb by astonishment, the habitually silent man was struck loquacious. The great lady with the great park, who had heard Lord Clandon described as so shy and reserved, was surprised, in her turn, by the pertinacity of his questions concerning the young lady opposite; into whose ears Sir Wolseley Maitland was pouring the most egregious nonsense, for the amusement of Lady Mary de Capell, who was seated on his other side.

But the great lady with the great park could not be

brought to acknowledge that she knew anything of such very small deer as the Barringtons! "They lived at the other side of the county. They were people she was not in the habit of meeting. She believed the person to whom the gentleman in the blue silk waistcoat was talking, was companion to Mrs. Barrington, or niece, or cousin, or something of that sort."

And she forthwith endeavoured to direct his attention to the damsels in pink satin and lilac gauze, whom she held so much worthier to be noticed; informing him that the former, Miss Vicary Arable, was "a great Buckinghamshire belle;" and the latter, who was seated beside Mr. Barrington, and looking as cheerful as one of the criminals people go to stare at, in a condemned cell, a daughter of her own.

But already "Clan" had relapsed into his customary reserve; a reserve that deepened into moroseness, when he saw by the heightened colour and downcast looks of his opposite neighbour, how painfully she was embarrassed by the audacious bantering of Sir Wolseley. No less at home at Greensells than, in the course of five minutes he had made himself at Easton Hoo,—more so, indeed, since, conscious that he was invited there as a victim to be paired off with whichever of the four ugly daughters found him least insupportable, he felt entitled to make Lady Heriford pay for her flagitious designs,—he was making his stay in the house as pleasant as he could, by turning their guests into ridicule; with the best intention of doing the same in their turn to the Ladies de Capell themselves, at Wolseley Hall, for the amusement of his cub friend, Lord Esher.

The only consolatory moment enjoyed by poor Maria, amidst her embarrassment, was when the slow movements of the ponderous Mr. Vicary Arable, a man about the dimensions of one of his own prize oxen, who intervened between them, enabled her to catch sight of her cousin. Attributing to the smiles of Miss Maitland, beside whom Charles was seated, the air of joyous animation which at Easton seldom lighted up his handsome face, and which, in fact, arose from the agreeable discovery that his father and mother were able instinctively to reassume the tone of the Barringtons of Hexholm, on regaining the sphere of society from which they had been alienated only by a change of

fortune, Maria conceived his happiness to proceed from the joyful certainty that the deficiencies of Easton had not rendered him less pleasing where he was ambitious to please.

Of the impression she was herself making, she took no heed. Her utmost desire was to creep unnoticed through her visit to Greensells, so as to bring no shame upon her cousin; and be able to admire, unmolested, the cool expanse of its glassy waters, the fine architecture of its Vitruvian structure, and the treasures of its valuable picture gallery. For, though such sights were familiar to all the other persons assembled, *she* saw them for the first time. Her life had been divided between the seclusion of a strict school, and the scarcely less monotonous solitude of Easton—a radius of five miles from the Hoo comprehending her knowledge of the world!

Even the fine old oaks, therefore, adorning the domain of Greensells, and supposed to be coeval with the old priory on whose ruins the present habitation was founded, were such as she had never seen before; and the sight of the beautiful conservatory, enriched with a thousand tropical plants, of whose existence her wildest flights of imagination had never dreamed, startled her, as with a new view of creation.

To Lady Alicia and her sisters, such newness was as new as, to Maria, the aspect of the New Zealand and Mexican rarities. A little less complete, and they would have laughed at it; but the frankness with which she avowed her ignorance and delight, was sacred.

The girl whom, after their visit to the house which they had named the Tower of Famine, they had also signalized by the name of Cinderella, was accordingly adopted by acclamation as a general favourite. They were at the pains of showing her the house and gardens,—a concession after which Miss Vicary Arable, in all her pride of provincial fashion, might have sighed in vain. Lady Alicia was even at the trouble of securing Mr. Barrington's promise that he would remain till after luncheon the following day; when she promised that the fountains of their miniature Versailles should be played for the amusement of the novice.

At this wondrous favour shown to a person so insignificant, the pink satin and lilac gauze sat wondering and enraged. It was not for them to perceive, that by patronizing an obscure girl like Maria Brenton, the Ladies De Capell risked nothing—their degree of intimacy with her depending solely on their will and pleasure. Whereas, with themselves, as daughters of great landed proprietors in the county, if familiar once, they must be familiar always; congregating with them at races and hunt-balls, and even enduring, in London, a renewal of the acquaintanceship barely tolerable in the country.

The only circumstance of the affair, meanwhile, which impressed Maria, was the comparative coolness of Miss Maitland. As less elevated in rank, it could not be pride that kept her aloof from one whom the daughters of a marchioness delighted to honour; and it struck her (and what emotions were produced in her bosom by the mere surmise!) that the beautiful Eleanor might be jealous of the good will apparently existing between her and her cousin. For, true to the instincts of his worldly nature, on finding her an object of general admiration and panegyric, Charles was pleased to bestow upon her the courtesies and compliments she was little in the habit of receiving from him at home.

Far, however, was her guileless nature from surmising the *real* origin of the feelings overclouding the fair brow of Miss Maitland; and causing her to recede from the group of young ladies, which, according to the custom of the De Capell family, collected in the course of the evening round a table covered with workboxes and albums, as far as possible from the heads of the family. Instead of taking her usual share in their gossip, she kept edging her chair towards the divan in the centre of the room; lounging dozily on whose cushions of yellow damask, sat the marquis of Heriford, emitting the fleecy flakes of his shapeless politics, like cotton from a carding-machine, for the benefit of Mr. Barrington, Mr. Vicary Arable, and Sir Justinian Ironsides; who, though satisfied that the same would be unfolded to them in a more compact form, in the course of the month, in an "Address to the Nobility, Gentry, and Clergy (as though the names were incongruous!) of the

county of Bucks," sat with their mouths deferentially open, to swallow the common-places of one who had so recently filled them with good things of a better kind—viz. venison and claret.

Had Lady Alicia, or one of her sisters, taken up her position there with the same air of edification, her proceedings would have been understood by the rest of the family as a capital joke—as though she were enacting fogleman to insure the proper attitude of attention incumbent on country neighbours towards the *potter* of their lord-lieutenant. But the attention bestowed by Miss Maitland on his lordship's exceedingly prosy prose, was hard to conceive; unless she fancied that, in her gilded *fauteuil*, with a volume of engravings open upon her knee, she displayed a picturesque grace likely to recall the roving eyes of Charles.

For she had not appeared wholly inattentive during dinner to his allusions to the fine speech made on the eve of the dissolution of Parliament by "his cousin, Lord Coylsfield;" or to the compliments paid him by Lord Clandon on the ancient standing of his family in the county. And when, in answer to Mrs. Vicary Arable's encomiums on the beautiful texture of Miss Brenton's dress, he observed with ineffable impertinence that "they kept a rich uncle in India, for the express purpose of supplying the family with shawls and muslins, *en attendant* that he was obliging enough to die and do better for them still." Miss Maitland, though she said nothing, evidently thought the more.

Considering how little acquaintance subsisted between the Herifords and their heterogeneous guests, the evening passed less heavily than might have been expected. Lady Alicia and Lady Mary having no accomplices but Sir Wolseley Maitland to abet their system of finding a butt among their visitors, were glad to take part in the general circle; whereas, when their brother Henry was with them, they sat in a knot apart, laughing and quizzing, and making every one present uncomfortable. But there was something in the genuine character and ladylike manners of Miss Brenton that compelled them to civility; and Lady Sophia was not, as usual, the only member of the family who exerted

herself to prevent a stranger from feeling otherwise than at home. As to Lord Clandon, after serving as a target for the rough jokes of Sir Wolseley, who seemed to think he could not better amuse the Ladies de Capell than by laughing at their brother, he made a slow calm retreat into the library, for the perusal of the newspapers which had arrived by the second post; and an hour afterwards, the party separated for the night.

Maria, who had imbibed that day a greater variety of new impressions than in any preceding year of her life,—who had never before seen such a blaze of artificial light; never heard such a confusion of voices,—or beheld in bright conjunction such a host of the means and appliances of aristocratic life,—chambers so lofty, halls so echoing, stair-cases so gigantic,—had no right to wonder as she did that, at the close of a day thus diversified by pleasurable sensations, she should feel so weary.

On the morrow, though almost disappointed to wake, for the first time for so many years, in any other than the tent-bed in her little white-washed attic at Easton, it was something to know that the gratifications of the preceding day were about to be renewed; that she might wander at leisure among those spirit-stirring pictures, and learn the names of those mysterious flowers which looked as if transplanted from the banks of the Euphrates.

On stealing to the lofty window, the summer-glories of Greensells lay displayed before her; long canals unrolling like silvery ribbons as far as the eye could reach; while between them, a vast lake extended its mirror-like expanse. On the lawn, intervening between its margin and the stately mansion, bubbling fountains threw up their translucent jets from marble shells which communicated by a single stream with the lake. All that met the view beneath the glowing sky, was water and freshness. If sufficiently regal in fortune to have a habitation for every month in the year, Maria could not but admit that Greensells was the very spot for the dog-days.

“Frightful,—is it not?” said Sir Wolseley Maitland, startling her from her reverie, as, on her way to find Mrs. Barrington’s room for the purpose of accompanying her to the breakfast-room, she stood transfixed before the vast win-

dow that supplied light to the grand staircase and commanded a view of the park. "For my part, I wonder the De Capells are not born with fins! Lord Heriford ought to set up over the gates the arms of the Fishmongers' Company, with a couple of water nymphs for supporters; or portraits of Lady Mary and one of her sisters as mermaids, —a character they are not ill-fitted to represent, being seldom without a looking-glass in their hands."

Annoyed at finding herself *tête-à-tête* with the bold, familiar man with whom, of all the Greensells party, she was least in charity, Miss Brenton, instead of pursuing her way along the corridor towards which the steps of Sir Wolseley seemed directed, walked leisurely down stairs, meaning to return when he had disappeared. But proceed as slowly as she would, he still kept his place by her side; chatting and laughing till the domed ceiling of the staircase rang with his mirth.

Mrs. Vicary Arable, Miss Vicary Arable, and Miss Emma Vicary Arable, who overtook her on the first landing-place, clinging as closely together as the three gilt graces of an epergne, appeared inexpressibly shocked at beholding Mrs. Barrington's "companion, or niece, or something of that sort," thus familiarly accompanied; more especially on hearing Sir Wolseley accost her, as they passed, with "I hope *you* are not going to risk an ague at this confounded fishing party? Make no scruple in throwing it over, I entreat you; for my valet assures me that the last time one of these froggeries was dragged, the smell of the mud was perceptible as far as Hyde Park."

The three Buckinghamshire ladies with the double name which they fancied doubled their consequence, hurried past in a cluster, thanking goodness that no man had ever ventured to address *them* in terms so flippant; while Sir Wolseley, who was much in the habit of doing the honours of his friends' houses to their friends (and sometimes even to themselves), began to inquire whether, instead of leaving them after luncheon, Miss Brenton and her friends could not be persuaded to stay another day.

More and more harassed by importunities which her ignorance of the jargon employed by her companion

rendered it difficult to parry, yet afraid to retrace her steps without a pretext, right glad was she to catch a glimpse of her cousin Charles in the vestibule below; on reaching which, she mechanically placed her arm within his.

Only four-and-twenty hours before, the first impulse of Charles Barrington would probably have been to drop it, or bluntly ask her "what she wanted?" but he had received too many compliments at Greensells on the beauty of his fair cousin, to hazard an act of discourtesy.

"I dare say you are looking for the breakfast-room; let me show you the way," said he. On their road thither, they encountered the old marquis; who was in the habit of making as reverential a bow in his own house to everything of the female gender as became one of the last surviving courtiers of the old school; and the ceremonious greeting that ensued enabled him to take a survey of the cousins, such as afforded some justification of the compliments which, while waiting after breakfast under the portico for the carriages that were to convey them to the water side, he saw fit to address to Mr. Barrington.

"A very sweet creature, that niece of yours. I have already expressed to you, my dear sir, my opinion of your son. A fine young man,—really a very fine young man; and a charming couple they will make."

Though burning to vent his feelings of dislike against his niece, Mr. Barrington contented himself with expressing his disapproval of marriages between cousins, or early marriages of any kind.

"The boys of the day," observed he, "appear to look for a wife before they have done with their Latin grammar."

"In a certain rank of life," was Lord Heriford's stately rejoinder, "they can hardly marry too soon. A young man who has a stake in the country, substantiates it, my dear sir, by an early settlement in life. Look at my son Clandon. From the day of his coming of age six years ago, it has been the wish of all belonging to him to see him happily married. But as if from mere perversity, he not only will not hear of it, but the more to mark his opposition, shuns everything like female society. Half his

shyness and oddity is attributable to the dread of being persecuted into matrimony."

"Perhaps Lord Clandon may have formed some choice which your lordship is unlikely to sanction?" pleaded Mr. Barrington, wishing only that Lord Heriford's confidence and the fishing-party were at an end, that he might get back the earlier to Easton, and surprise his labourers taking advantage of his absence.

"By no means! Such is our anxiety for his establishment, that no young person of good character and connections would be ill-received by his family. But I suppose it is because I have made it the wish of my heart to give my blessing before I die to a grandson, that he seems bent on frustrating my wishes."

A succession of equipages bearing the family emblazements (the perpetuation of which appeared so important to the mumbling old marquis), arriving at that moment at the door to convey the party to the Western lake which was at some distance from the house, luckily put an end to his oration.

Some minutes were lost in arranging the numerous guests in the various carriages; nor was it till they reached the water side, and took possession of the tent which had been pitched to protect the ladies from the noon-day heat, that the absence of Lord Clandon was noticed.

"Clandon!—Where's Clan?—We shall never get on without Clan!" cried Sir Wolseley Maitland, beginning to fear that too large an allotment of young ladies might be thrown upon his hands to entertain. And while some of the party proposed that a messenger should be despatched back to the house in search of his lordship, all pretended to be mightily concerned at his absence.

"I dare say he has gone out riding!" said one of his sisters.

"My brother hates anything like a party of pleasure!" cried Lady Mary. "I was sure he would stay away, the moment I heard you ask him to come!" continued she, addressing Eleanor Maitland.

"I suppose Lord Clandon has found out that some people *ne brillent que par leur absence!*" replied the fair coquette, in a voice not intended to reach far.

But the ear which her observation purported to propitiate, was inattentive. Charles Barrington, carrying on his arm the shawls and cloaks of the marchioness, was engaged in a lively conversation with Lady Alicia de Capell.

CHAPTER VI.

Dis moi,—crois tu vraiment posséder ce royaume
 D'ombre et de fleurs, où l'arbre arrondi comme un dôme,
 L'étang, lame d'argent, que le coucher fait d'or,—
 L'allée, entrant au bois comme un noir corridor ;
 Et là, sur la forêt, ce mont qu'une tour garde,
 Font un groupe si beau pour l'âme qui regarde ?—
 Lieu sacré pour qui sait, dans l'immense univers,
 Dans les prés, dans les eaux, et dans les vallons verts,
 Retrouver les profils de la face éternelle !—VICTOR HUGO.

MARIA BRENTON was more astonished than might have been expected from her rational good sense at finding herself seated, at a later hour of the day, beside the self-same meagre old dinner-table of Easton they had left behind ; for, though before they set forth on the fishing expedition, the carriages of the visitors were ordered to be in attendance after luncheon, it seemed impossible that people who appeared to take such delight in being together should separate so soon, merely because such had been their intention before they discovered each other to be so charming.

She was not yet sufficiently schooled in the tactics of country visiting to know that new visitors were to arrive by dressing-time, to occupy their rooms, and be noticed, questioned, flirted or drunk wine with, in their turn ; to give place on the morrow to a new detachment, till the whole neighbourhood had received an equitable distribution of the hospitalities of the great man whose son was likely to start for the county.

Charles Barrington, indeed, remained behind at Greenells, a bachelor's lodging being always accomplishable, and, with five young ladies in the house, an additional man an acquisition. And though it was probably his absence which

caused his cousin to look wistfully round, and fancy the faded dining-room a *little* cheerless, the darned table-cloth almost too shabby for use, and the stillness of the room unaccountable, she could not help reproaching herself that an absence of only twenty-four hours from Easton should have exercised so great an influence over her feelings.

Both her uncle and aunt, on the other hand, were cheered by their visit. Contact with persons of the class with which in their brighter youth they had exclusively associated, seemed for the moment to restore them to themselves. It was pleasant to find that they had not forfeited caste.

Lady Heriford and her daughters, distinguishing at once between the quiet, well-bred manners of Mrs. Barrington, and the flashy, pushing, over-dressed familiarity of the Vicary Arables and Ironsides, had accepted her at sight, and delighted her by their encomiums of her son and niece; while her husband, whose constant residence in the county, and circumstantiality of mind, enabled him to afford valuable electioneering information to the marquis, finding himself of more consequence than he expected, had forgiven all former slights, and was content to hear Greensells called a magnificent place, and the De Capells a charming family, as often as any member of his own thought proper.

He even deigned to overlook the reverie in which he surprised his niece that evening, seated on the old garden seat of the shrubbery (and with *him* reverie was only another name for idleness), believing her to be lost in reminiscences of the compliments addressed to her by the Heriford family; and especially of the alacrity with which, on hearing her avow her ambition to become a horsewoman, the lubberly Lord Clandon had muttered an offer of his favourite mare, which he recommended as a capital lady's horse.

It was not, however, upon this that Maria was ruminating. The new world into which she had been introduced had made her acquainted with other novelties besides Gobelin tapestry and buhl cabinets, Dresden china or marble columns. She had heard, for the first time, the jargon of the world. She had seen, for the first time, an exchange of glances invalidate, in a dialogue, the words that fell from the lips of the speakers. She had seen one feature give the lie to another in the same countenance; and heard axioms

plausibly delivered at variance with every action of the life of him who mouthed them. The hypocrisy of social life was unveiled before her.

“If such double-dealing be perceptible in the country-house of a respectable nobleman,” thought the poor girl, “how much more in those brilliant scenes of fashionable life in which my cousin appears to concentrate his hopes of happiness!”

A still heavier sigh burst from the depths of her heart as she admitted the fitness of the beautiful Eleanor to share in the pains and pleasures of such a career. For of those whose insincerity had been most apparent at Greensells, Miss Maitland was the one whose hollowness of purpose she had been quickest to discover.

As if stimulated by the attention bestowed by her handsome admirer on Lady Alicia, Eleanor had contrived that, on their return from the water-party, he should occupy the same Pelham with herself and his cousin, when the whole De Capell family was discussed without mercy.

“I have been trying to get off the Heriford Castle party,” said she; “but Lady Heriford will not hear of granting leave of absence to my brother. Having overcome his objections to the bulrushes of Greensells, for the purpose of placing three of her daughters—ugly, uglier, and ugliest, at his disposal,—she evidently hopes to complete in the air what has been commenced on the water; so that we are irrevocably booked for the eagle’s eyry in the North.”

“And which of your friends is likely to become your sister-in-law?” inquired Charles, apparently a little embarrassed by her confidences.

“Not Lady Alicia, I hope,—for she is both too clever and too plain for Wolseley. Not Lady Sophia, I fear,—for she still wears a willow, which seems likely to become an evergreen. Not Lady Mary, I suspect, though on that point, as on most others, we do not agree. And not Lady Blanche, I am sure,—for he would as soon have a black wife as a blue!”

Shocked at these bitter allusions, Maria trusted her cousin was meditating a defence of those with whom she had seen him on terms of such friendly familiarity. But

his only answer was a smile. And now that Miss Brenton had leisure to reconsider the matter, she could not help fancying that, unrestrained by her presence, their comments must be more cruel than ever. Absorbed in them and their movements, she seemed to imagine that, now she was gone, though the house remained full of company, Eleanor and her cousin would be *tête-à-tête*; left to sharpen each other's worldly wit by a mutual exchange of heartless *bon-mots*.

Reproaching herself, however, that from all the kindness lavished upon her at Greensells, and all the noble and interesting objects unfolded there to her view, she should have extracted only food for painful rumination, the poor girl resolved to dismiss from her thoughts her transient glimpse of aristocratic pleasures. She would think no more of that brilliant saloon,—those gleaming lights,—those fragrant odours,—those murmurs of playful compliments. Easton was not changed. The skies were still as soft there,—the trees as green; and Easton should be all in all.

It was difficult, however. For even her uncle, gratified to have seen his son moving with high distinction in a lordly circle which it cost him less to propitiate than to keep on visiting terms with the old Forsyths, or his self-sufficient neighbours, Sir Hildebrand and Lady Chalkneys of Pountney Hill, could not forbear expressing his surmises, next morning at breakfast, concerning the new party assembled at Greensells. He wondered whether Charles would continue his stay till the family proceeded to Heriford Castle? He wondered whether the Harmans would be invited by the marquis, in their turn? He wondered whether his lordship would choose to make acquaintance with the Chalkneys?

On the latter point he was not long in doubt. In the course of the morning, the Pountney Hill pony-phaëton drove to the door, to the utter annoyance of the master of the house, who, having been so vociferous among his country neighbours in his declaration of war against Greensells, felt a little ashamed of having to confess his bloodless defeat. It is one of the many nuisances of country life, however, that the plea of "not at home" is untenable, even against the least agreeable visitors; and the Chalkneys, who, in a

city, would have been excluded as bores, were, of necessity, admitted at Easton Hoo.

They were not bad people. They were not ignorant people. Their offence was one against which there exists no enactment of Church or State;—they were eminently disagreeable. A spirit of envious tetchiness placed them on bad terms with themselves and their neighbours.

Even the advantages which qualified their self-consequence, were a source of heartache and mortification to them. Sir Hildebrand wrote himself a baronet; but his father having been baronetized at the prayer of a gouty governor-general of India to whom he officiated as physician, ashamed of the cause and date of his creation, he envied every K.C.B. or K.C.H. to whom it fell to his luck to address a letter.

Again, though his fortune of 3,000*l.* a year rendered him the richest man in the parish, as three fourths of it had been amassed in trade by his wife's father, he conceived himself looked down upon by the landed proprietors of the county.

And yet, as if these *raws* were not enough for a man of such extreme susceptibility, he had been rash enough to purchase a seat at the top of a high hill,—the nightmare of the coachmen and coach-horses of the neighbourhood;—and on finding himself less visited than people more conveniently located, chose to consider himself a victim to the jealous ostracism of the county.

His pretty little wife, who, married to a more reasonable man, might have become an agreeable member of society, had contracted from her husband the propensity for grafting their golden pippins with crab-apples, and their greengages with sloes, till she was almost as unpopular as himself. She had given up singing, in which she excelled, from having been warned by her husband that people invited them only to amuse their company;—and even went so far as to quarrel with her own delicate features in the glass, because assured by him that somebody had called her, in somebody else's hearing, “a pretty little fool.”—The Barringtons, as people of a more ancient family, and long seated in the county, were objects of their especial envy; and the purport of their present visit was to boast of an invitation they had received to dine at Greensells the following week,

—the Marquis of Heriford having written to inform them that Archdeacon Rubric and his family would be of the party, for the express purpose of introducing them. “And, as I have no outstanding grievances against his lordship,” added Sir Hildebrand, with a consequential air, alluding to the former protestations of Mr. Barrington, “I have, of course, no scruple about accepting so very flattering an invitation.”

“Of course not!” was Mrs. Barrington’s genuine reply. “It is always to be regretted when personal enmities arise between those whom county interests ought to unite. I was truly glad when Mr. Barrington accepted the olive branch offered by Lord Heriford.”

“We *meet* you, then?” inquired Lady Chalkneys, with an air of chagrin, having flattered herself that they and the archdeacon’s family were the only persons of the neighbourhood distinguished by an invitation.

“No;—I scarcely think we shall be invited *again*.—Charles may, perhaps, prolong his visit till then.”

“I do not exactly understand what you mean by prolonging his visit?”—said Sir Hildebrand, becoming a little fidgety.

“My son accompanied us to Greensells the day before yesterday; but was prevailed upon by his young friends to remain a few days longer than ourselves. *We* came back yesterday afternoon.”

“You dined and slept at Greensells!”—ejaculated the astonished baronet. “Without Barrington, of course?—Barrington has sworn to me hundreds of times that nothing would induce *him* to set foot in the house of a man who has used him so shabbily.”

“I am happy to say,” replied Mrs. Barrington, “that his resentments gave way at once, on finding Charles had been receiving in London the greatest kindness from the Heriford family.”

“Most extraordinary!—A man whom I always thought so consistent and conscientious as Barrington, to snatch at the first civility offered!”—

“It was offered in so kind and conciliatory a manner,” pleaded Mrs. Barrington, “that I should have been sorry indeed to see him persist in obduracy. Lord Clandon and

Lady Alicia de Capell called here, in person, two days after they arrived at Greensells; and in the course of luncheon, our visit was arranged."

"Called in person!"—reiterated Sir Hildebrand: "and to me, with whom they have never had any coolness, they think it sufficient to send a card!"——

"On that account, perhaps."

"Why, on that account?"——

"They may have felt some atonement to be due to Mr. Barrington. With a new comer into the county, there were no antecedents to be smoothed over."

"A new comer in the county!" reiterated Sir Hildebrand, bitterly. "Yes! *that* precious word is perpetually thrown in one's teeth; after purchasing an estate at double its value, and expending twice as much money there as any other person in the neighbourhood! Always at the tag of every thing!—Always at the bottom of the list!—Lord Clandon must have literally passed my lodge-gates in crossing the country from Greensells hither,—yet was not at the trouble of so much as leaving a card!"——

"Surely it would not have been very courteous to leave a card at your lodge?"—interposed Maria, hoping to soothe him. "And their horses were, I assure you, quite knocked up, even without attempting the hill."

"And whom had you at Greensells?" inquired Lady Chalkneys, less from the desire of pacification than because unable to repress the promptings of female curiosity.

"The party from town, which is a large one, and the Ironsides, and Vicary Arables."

"The Vicary Arables, and Ironsides!—The two leading families of the county!"—cried Sir Hildebrand. "And the Nevilles and Hampsons, it seems, are going there to-day!—Every one has the preference over *us*."——

"Because they were old acquaintances of the family," pleaded Lady Chalkneys, in some alarm lest her husband's wrath should wax so great as to determine him to send an excuse, and extinguish her only chance of becoming acquainted with the marchioness.

"Who on earth is there left of the neighbourhood to meet us, I should like to know?" exclaimed Sir Hildebrand, disregarding her.

"You mentioned the archdeacon's family," observed Mrs. Barrington.

"Yes! The halt, the deaf, and the blind,—the last resource of one's visiting list. But the Rubrics will not suffice to fill such a dinner-table as that at Greensells!—I dare say we shall have the Tring apothecary, and the curate of the parish, to make out the party!"

"You will find the De Capell family very sociable and pleasant," said Maria, addressing Lady Chalkneys, who was beginning to look a little dismayed. "On the second day, I began to feel quite at home among them."

"Yes, the second day!"—interrupted Sir Hildebrand. "In a house one sleeps in, there is some chance of becoming acquainted with people. But a country dinner-party, at seven miles distance, leaves only a quarter of an hour for coffee, before the carriages are ordered to come away again; especially where people have the impertinence to invite one for half-past seven, and with such a hill as mine at the end of the journey!"—

Remembering how often they had heard that hapless hill described by the baronet as no obstacle to man or horse, Mrs. Barrington and her niece remained judiciously silent.

"I ought to have thought of all these things before I accepted their confounded invitation!" resumed Sir Hildebrand, on finding that no one was kind enough to contradict him. "However, Lord Heriford must be taught that second thoughts are best; for *I* shall certainly find myself indisposed to-morrow, and decline the honour of the expedition."

"It would be a pity to lose the opportunity of making a pleasant acquaintance," observed Mrs. Barrington, rightly interpreting the chagrined air of his wife; "for the family will remain but a short time longer at Greensells. They are on their way to Heriford Castle."

"Very likely! I know nothing about their movements,—and care as little!"—rejoined her irritated visitor. "Marchionesses and Marchionesses are people out of our line!—*We* never pretended to society above our sphere.—Lord and Lady Heriford might have spent six months at Greensells, without *our* troubling ourselves to inquire about them or their movements."

Maria could not but admire the mildness with which Mrs.

Barrington abstained from self-vindication ; and the angry man who had visited Easton with the view of mortifying his neighbours, on finding that he could not provoke so much as a peevish retort, observed that, "As they had to call at the Vicarage, it was impossible to await the chance of Barrington's return." Whether or not he fulfilled his threat of excusing himself to the Herifords, he would not deny himself the satisfaction of parading to Dr. and Mrs. Forsyth the invitation he had received. *They*, at least, had not been dining and sleeping at Greensells !

As the phaëton of the spiteful couple drove away, the face of Sir Hildebrand flushed with suppressed ire, and the brows of poor little Lady Chalkneys knit with vexation,—(how different from the triumphant attitude they had assumed on approaching the house !) Mrs. Barrington could not help thinking, that the absenteeism of the Marquis of Heriford's family, lamentations over which formed one of the staple commodities of county-talk,—was, perhaps, after all, a lucky thing for them ; since their sojourn at Greensells, for only a single fortnight, had sufficed to make half the families in the neighbourhood malicious or discontented.

In the course of a day or two her opinion was confirmed. The Harmans of Hedgington, and others of the minor county gentry, who could not reconcile to themselves that the son of persons so nearly of their own account in the shire as the Barringtons, should be the established inmate of the great man who took no cognizance of their existence, resented the distinction against his parents ; and wagged their heads significantly, while remarking in audible whispers, that "It was all very well. But the election would soon be coming on !"

Even Mrs. Barrington, when the first flutter of motherly weakness subsided, which had induced her to rejoice at seeing "her own—her only," fêted and caressed by those for whose favour so many competitors were disputing, and who, during her sojourn at Greensells, had triumphantly compared her son with Sir Wolseley Maitland and Lord Clandon, till the boorishness of the latter, and the flashiness of the former, served to diminish the flagrancy of Charles's minor offences,—could not help fearing, when day after day elapsed without bringing him back, or a single line in explanation

of his prolonged absence, that the circle in which he was moving would only serve to estrange him still further from home.

There had been moments of late, when, on noticing the hard and scornful eye with which her son surveyed all that was nearest to him, she bitterly repented having ever made the application which had proved the means of placing him in a sphere of action remote from their own. And now, when she thought of him, sunned in the glare of fashion and prosperity,—laughing with the insolent, and smiled upon by the heartless,—and beheld Maria seated humble and anxious by her side, renouncing all thought or care of her youthful loveliness, in solicitude for his welfare,—she could not repress a wish that he had never formed an ambition beyond the range of their humble fireside.

“Had Charles been brought up as his father wished him,” mused she, while her tearful eyes rested upon the downcast looks of her niece, “he might have been less accomplished in mind and person. But he would have been happier himself, perhaps; and would certainly have made *us* more happy.”

At the end of ten days, even his father expressed surprise at his silence. But having no horse to ride over to Greensells, and the distance being too great for his coach-horses to go and return, a morning visit was impracticable. He contented himself, therefore, with assuring his wife that she was a fool to expect any token of respect or explanation from their son, so long as he could obtain harbourage under the roof a marquis.

Mr. Barrington was even on the verge of resuming his former tone of antagonism against the De Capells, in all their generations, as the origin of the truant's neglect; when, lo! one sultry afternoon, near enough the first of September to send country gentlemen into their turnip-fields to keep an eye on the coveys, he was fortunate enough to encounter, in a narrow lane, the pony-phaëton of Sir Hildebrand.

The harvest and the quarter-sessions supplied them with topics for the five minutes' colloquy inevitable between even the bitterest country neighbours, compelled to sociability betwixt the ramparts of two quickset hedges. But just as Sir Hildebrand, perceiving that the ponies were

getting fidgety from the flies, and his lady cross from the fidgetiness of the ponies, began to give short answers, with an evident intention of proceeding in his drive, Mr. Barrington placed one of his heavy high-lowed feet detainingly on the spoke of the fore-wheel, and leaning his elbow on his knee, inquired familiarly of her ladyship—"how she liked her visit to Greensells?"

"Oh! amazingly! Charming young people the De Capells, and a most agreeable party in the house;" replied Lady Chalkneys, with affected raptures, to conceal her husband's embarrassment at this abrupt broaching of the subject. "Such a comfort to escape, for once, from the routine of Ironsides and Vicary Arables,—whose good stories and best gowns one knows by heart!"

"I concluded the party must be a pleasant one," rejoined Mr. Barrington, trying to look unconcerned,—“for my son has not yet been able to tear himself away. My son is still at Greensells.”

"At Greensells! On a visit, then, to the old house-keeper?" exclaimed Sir Hildebrand, with a provoking chuckle, inexpressibly delighted to have at length detected his aspiring neighbours at fault. "The family set off on Tuesday last for Heriford Castle."

"Gone to Heriford Castle!" cried Mr. Barrington, startled out of all presence of mind.

"Why, you don't pretend that, after the long acquaintance with Lord and Lady Heriford, to which you alluded the other day, you have to learn from *me*—a stranger in the county—their comings or goings? But, of course, you are joking,—of course they took leave of their old friends before their departure."

"I had no idea they would fulfil their threat of going so soon, or I should not have been remiss enough to let the marquis leave Buckinghamshire without the common civility of returning his son's visit," replied Mr. Barrington, relapsing into his habitual surliness.

"But your son—did not *he* apprise you? What can have become of your son?" cried the triumphant boronet.

"Ay, what *can* have become of Mr. Charles Barrington?" added Lady Chalkneys, re-animated by the manifest discomfiture of their neighbour.

"Gone with the family, doubtless, to Heriford Castle," said Mr. Barrington, removing his foot from the wheel.

"Most likely!" cried Sir Hildebrand, flourishing his whip over his ponies preparatory to a start, with as much affectation of coachmanship as though driving a team. "But I am not sure that I should feel easy at knowing a son of mine to be enrolled in Lady Heriford's brigade. You must look sharp after the young gentleman, Barrington, I can tell you, or you will be having him swallowed like an oyster, before he is aware of it, one of these days, by one of those ugly girls!"

CHAPTER VII.

"She'll none of the count. She'll not match above her degree, either in estate, years, or wit.—SHAKESPEARE.

Two days after this encounter, and long before Mr. Barrington was weary of harassing his wife with expressions of indignation at the conduct of Charles, in fancying that the independence he enjoyed entitled him to dispense with all show of respect towards his family, Maria and her aunt were startled by the footman's announcement that "a man as had been inquiring for master, on finding he warn't at home, desired to see missus." And lo! before they had time for further inquiries, Lord Clandon walked into the room.

Conceiving that he had business with her husband, Mrs. Barrington did her best to entertain him till the return of the master of the house. But so difficult was it to extract even monosyllables from the shy "man," that it was not till the close of half-an-hour his hostess managed to discover that he was remaining behind at Greensells to avoid the tumult of the fashionable party assembled at the family residence for the despatch of dinners and daughters, on pretence of pursuing his canvass of the county of Bucks.

Less interested in the parliamentary prospects of Lord Heriford's son and heir than the movements of her own,

Mrs. Barrington soon ascertained that Charles had indeed accompanied the family to their seat in the north ; and it afforded some palliation of his neglect that, when they quitted Greensells, he had been on the point of starting for home, had not the marchioness suddenly prevailed on him to alter his destination.

“ You must not expect much consistency from those whose measures are influenced by my mother and sisters,” observed Lord Clandon (who appeared to be in an unusually communicative vein), on perceiving that Mrs. Barrington was deeply wounded by the neglect of her son. “ They never know what they are going to do, and keep those they live with in the same uncertainty.”

Mrs. Barrington parried the remark, to which rejoinder was difficult, by observing that she should probably hear from her son in the course of a day or two ; after which the shy guest relapsed into silence. Even when the master of the house made his appearance, hot and cross from his barnyard, the monosyllables of the taciturn lord did not expand into phrases ; and though he prolonged his morning visit so far into the afternoon as to reach the family dinner-hour, which announced itself by the savoury vapours that place the sitting-rooms of a small house in possession of all its culinary secrets, he made as little apology for staying so long, as explanation of coming at all. When, however, Mr. Barrington, while accompanying him to the porch to see him mount his horse, chanced to observe that Charles’s absence from home would prevent his going out on the first of September (which was the Monday following), somewhat to his surprise, Lord Clandon proposed to ride over from Greensells to breakfast at Easton, that they might shoot together over some farms possessed by Lord Heriford in the neighbourhood, as coolly as though he had been conferring an order of knighthood.

“ Your very shy people certainly do the most impudent things ! ” observed the astonished Mr. Barrington, on returning to his family. “ This chap, who looks as if he would run his head into a holly-bush to avoid looking one in the face, makes himself twice as much at home in my house as Charles ever did in his life ! We shall be having him invite himself, on Monday, to take his mutton with us ; or,

perhaps, dine and sleep! However, the Rousley farms afford the best partridge-shooting in the county, and, as I shan't be sorry to let that sneering fellow Chalkneys, whose land lies contiguous, perceive that for once I have the upper hand, I did not throw cold water on the proposal."

Trusting to learn from the young earl further tidings of her son, from whom succeeding posts brought not a line, though she had now addressed a letter to him at Heriford Castle, Mrs. Barrington welcomed Lord Clandon cordially on the appointed morning; nay, though he had not a syllable of news to afford of the truant, both aunt and niece received without much betrayal of surprise the intimation that his lordship had accepted Mr. Barrington's proposal that, after lunching at Rousley, he should return and share their family dinner, so as to ride home in the evening.

"Since my son is so hospitably entertained in his father's house," observed Mr. Barrington, apart to his wife, as if apologizing for his unusual exercise of hospitality, "we cannot decently avoid showing this young man such civility as lies in our power."

It was unnecessary to avow further, the satisfaction he experienced in proving to the country neighbours, by whom he fancied himself estimated in proportion to the paucity of his acres, that, by greater people, he was valued according to his deserts: and on returning home to dinner, conscious that his larder was supplied with game for a week's consumption, and not so much as a partridge at the expense of the Easton estate, he found himself in such good humour with his noble guest, as to be only moderately fractious with his family. Lord Clandon's apologies for his shooting-jacket were received by his host with an entreaty that he would fancy himself one of the family.

It was difficult, however, for his wife and Maria to look upon the heavy, reserved young man, who seemed as uncomfortable in Mr. Barrington's house as in his mother's castle, as belonging to the same species with him in whose accustomed place he was seated,—the Charles, whose expressive eyes might have supplied the want of words, had his words been ever wanting; and though, by degrees, Lord Clandon became more sociable, he had not the art of making himself more agreeable.

"No, I have not yet heard from Heriford Castle," said he, in reply to Mrs. Barrington's inquiries; "I do not correspond regularly with my family. With the exception of my sister Sophia, none of them care much about me. For, as you have probably found out by this time," continued he, with an awkward attempt at a smile, "I am but a bumpkin, and far below the level of fashionable life."

Startled by this strong declaration on the part of one habitually so reserved, Mrs. Barrington had nothing to answer. But Maria seemed desirous of profiting by his start of talkativeness.

"But there are others besides your lordship's family at the castle," said she. "Lady Alicia de Capell told me the house was to be full of company throughout the shooting-season. I think I understood, too," added Maria, in a less assured tone, "that Sir Wolseley Maitland and his beautiful sister were engaged for a long visit?"

Lord Clandon looked steadily into her face. Perhaps to ascertain whether the tremulousness of her voice regarded the young baronet or the beautiful sister. And as, unlike the young ladies of his own family, every impulse of her nature was genuine, he was not long in forming his conclusions.

"Do you know much of the Maitlands?" said he, in return.

"Very little. I have seen them only twice; both times in your company."

"On which occasions you saw *me* as you will see me always," was his blunt rejoinder. "I have not, like the people we are talking of, a holiday and a working-day suit, so that I am soon known and easily remembered."

"I should not think it *very* difficult to remember Miss Maitland!" pleaded Maria, on perceiving that her uncle was too busy in carving a quarter of lamb to observe that she ventured to have an opinion of her own.

"Perhaps not!" retorted his lordship. "But neither brother nor sister is easily known; and they are people I am glad to forget!"

"In that case," exclaimed the frank Maria, "I am no longer surprised that you did not accompany the party to Heriford Castle. Yet my cousin thinks so differently of

them! Charles arrived from town talking of nothing but the charms of Miss Maitland!"

"So might I, perhaps, were I in Barrington's place," rejoined Lord Clandon. "Fine ladies are pretty toys to those who are only required to admire them in the shop window. But when one finds them seated by one's fireside, interrupting one's pursuits by their idle chattering, discrediting one's name by their foolish levity, and frustrating all the business of one's life, then, indeed, one sees through the varnish into the coarseness of the materials, and estimates them at their true value."

"You really alarm me!" said Mrs. Barrington, astonished at this sudden burst of eloquence; "for alas! these pretty toys constitute the idols of my son!"

"What signifies?" was Lord Clandon's prompt rejoinder. "*He* is not likely to be made their victim. There is nothing in *his* situation or circumstances to tempt them into spreading decoys for him. Charles Barrington may go and flirt his fill among them without danger."

"Without danger?" faltered Maria in a subdued voice, partly because her uncle's attention was now divided between their conversation and the salad he was stirring. "Is the danger nothing of wasting his affections where return is impossible,—or of his heart becoming callous and unprofitable as their own?"

"A man who cannot fight his way through the influences of society," rejoined Lord Clandon, almost sternly, "is unworthy to fill a place in it. But depend upon it, Miss Brenton, if your cousin should fall a victim to the smiles of Eleanor Maitland, it will be through no desire of hers—Eleanor Maitland flies at higher game."

Maria longed to follow up the hint by further questioning. But the despot of Easton, having now appeased his hunger, close to be heard in his turn. The gentlemen had encountered Sir Hildebrand Chalkneys and his keepers, in the course of their morning's sport; and it was impossible not to revenge himself on the cockney set-out of his arrogant neighbour, by a random shot or two at the pony, dogs, guns, and accoutrements, the first to be had for money and the worst for sportmanship, which had sent the testy baronet home to Pountney Hill, after a hard day's shooting,

with his heart full of grievances and his game-bag empty. "Sir Hildebrand, who fancied himself a crack shot! Sir Hildebrand, who had given thirty guineas a brace for his pointers, and as much more for his retrievers!"

"An absurd person enough!" rejoined Lord Clandon, in reply. "The Chalkneys dined one day at Greensells, and gave themselves such airs that the house seemed hardly large enough to hold them. After dinner, Sir Hildebrand favoured my father with a lecture on the Poor Laws, that was worth its weight in lead."

"A lecture to a man of twice his age and more than twice his understanding?" observed Mrs. Barrington.

"What a consummate ass!" added her husband.

"It would be unfair to laugh at him were he merely an ass," added the earl. "Folly is a natural infirmity, and deserves compassion. But a blockhead who chooses to set the world to rights, is as legitimate an object of derision as the lame man who attempts to dance."

"How true,—how *very* true!" cried Miss Brenton, struck by the good sense which was beginning to flow from the unsealed lips of their visitor.

"A true sentiment, but a borrowed one. I found it among the maxims of the Duc de Lévis," added Lord Clandon, with a smile. And the candour of the acknowledgment did him more honour in the eyes of his fair auditress, than if he had originated all the apophthegms of Bacon.

"Sir Hildebrand," continued he, as much surprised to find himself listened to, as the others to find him talkative, "will not allow his egotism to be overlooked. A quietly-selfish person is a mere epicurean, who, demanding no elbow-room for his egotism, has a right to pass on unmo-lestled. But one who knocks you down to make way for himself, must expect hard usage in return."

"Poor Chalkneys was in the right!" was the secret commentary of the narrow-minded host on these observations. "Having no influence in the county, they would not attend to him at Greensells!"

A very different impression was, however, made on Mrs. Barrington, by the sayings and doings of their guest. She was beginning to understand that, with such matter-of-fact

views of men and things, the levities of fashion with which Lord Clandon lived surrounded, must render his home-circle sadly distasteful. Her husband had accidentally related to her, on their return from Greensells, the observations of the old marquis concerning the marriage of his son; and now that she was becoming better acquainted with the nature concealed under the rough coating of the young lord's reserve, it was easy to understand that the idea of being entrapped by one of the fair-faced puppets dancing like motes in the sunshine of aristocratic life, might have driven him, in self-defence, into his present bluntness of address and habits of seclusion. He was not the first whom the worthlessness of the company that calls itself the best, has driven into obscurity for refuge, as eels glide into the mud.

Albeit devoid of a grain of the match-maker in her composition, the good aunt could not but perceive, moreover, when their noble visitor took his departure for a two hours' ride across the country, through a drizzling rain, on a moonless night, that there were strong symptoms, on the part of the young earl, of being touched by the merits of her niece. Mr. Barrington's county interest was not sufficiently important to have made him brave so much, for electioneering purposes; or Mr. Barrington's conversational powers so attractive as to suffice for an inducement. Nor was it so long since Mrs. Barrington had been young and pretty herself, as to render it difficult to conceive, that a face so fair as Maria's, and manners so ingratiating, might have achieved a conquest which half the coquettes of May Fair had attempted in vain.

Under other circumstances, the distance dividing the son and heir of the Marquis of Heriford from her portionless niece, would have prevented her indulging, even for a moment, the feelings of satisfaction with which, (since the accomplishment of a marriage between her son and the amiable Maria was hopeless), she allowed herself to contemplate the possibility of Lord Clandon's attachment. But the anxiety of his family for his settlement in life afforded hopes that they would not very bitterly oppose his union with the daughter of a soldier who had died in the service of his country, well-connected, and irreproachable; and with an

earnest prayer that the gratuitous predilection entertained by the poor girl for her less worthy cousin, might give way under the influence of an assiduous courtship on the part of one possessing so many claims to her regard, Mrs. Barrington resolved to afford every facility in her power to Lord Clandon's advances, by forbearing to draw her husband's attention to the subject. Aware that, in such conjunctures, interference of any kind is injurious, she felt that she was but forwarding the interests of Maria, by allowing matters to take their course.

Time and tide were in her favour. Deserted by the family, Greensells had again become a desert. The long canals lay glistening in the sun, in wearisome uniformity; and the domed hall gave back a hollow echo, whenever Lord Clandon set foot on its marble floor. His solitary breakfast-table looked out of proportion to the vast chamber in which the housekeeper chose it to be placed; nor did it occur to the listless earl to interfere on his own behalf.—It seemed easier to order his horse and ride over to the quaint old Grange, where a seat awaited him at the frugal board where he felt himself entitled to replace the son entertained under his father's roof,—than to make himself comfortable at home. There was always some knotty point of county jurisdiction to refer to Mr. Barrington's opinion;—always advice to ask for the direction of his agricultural studies;—and in return, the preserves and keepers of Lord Heriford were placed at the disposal of one who was only too ready an acceptor of anything and everything that could be had for nothing.

By degrees, Maria, who, on finding that he did not correspond with Heriford Castle, discovered his constant visits to be a restraint, grew accustomed to the company of a person, for whose entertainment so little exertion was necessary. Lord Clandon's chief delight seemed to be let alone; and, so long as he was permitted to come and go when he pleased, and eat, without ceremony or apology, a worse dinner than was served to his father's footmen, he was more than content. To be released from the ceremonial of life and unimportuned by hollow obsequiousness was a considerable relief. And when to this sensation of release, was added the satisfaction of being listened to by one who made

no pretence of coinciding in his opinions, and smiled upon by a face, every change of whose mutable expression he knew to be governed by the emotions of an honest heart, it was, as he said to himself in secret every time that from the turn of the road he caught sight of the twisted old chimneys of Easton Hoop, a happiness seldom enjoyed by one of his degree.

The neighbours were beginning to feel a little surprised. Though Mrs. Barrington judiciously forbore all objection to her husband's proposal that the Chalkneys and Harmaus should be invited to meet Lord Clandon some day at dinner, so that, for want of opposition, the project fell to the ground, it was not likely that the transit of such a Phoenix as the heir apparent of a marquis should pass unnoticed of servants and farmers; and Pountney Hill would probably have contrived to insinuate that the intimacy was clandestine, but from the incontrovertible fact of Charles Barrington's prolonged visit to the parents of the earl.

They might have insinuated it, however,—might have said it, and proved it,—and Lord Clandon would have cared nothing about the matter. The same independence of spirit which made him cross the country on a shaggy shooting-pony, in a jacket in which Sir Hildebrand Chalkneys's keeper would have been discharged for appearing, would have made him heartily enjoy the wonder expressed by the house of Vicary Arable, in all its branches, at his familiarity with a family who never went to town for the season, and had no housekeeper's room.

Satisfied that he was happier at Easton than he had ever been in his life, the climax of his felicity at length arrived, though in a somewhat questionable shape. A tornado, which served to uproot some hundreds of the finest old trees in Greensells Chase, seemed to render it an act of inhumanity to send forth into the midnight storm a guest to whom the unoccupied chamber of young Barrington extended its arms; and Lord Clandon would have thought the loss of the finest avenue of his father's domain a thousandfold repaid, by the joy of sleeping, or, more properly, lying awake, under the same roof with the object of his now impassioned love. The room allotted him might have been an attic, and he would have thought it a chamber of dais.

It was, however, such as might content a daintier mortal than himself; since every moment of Maria's leisure hours was devoted to embellish and renovate every object promoting in the remotest degree the comfort and enjoyments of one to whom her own were a matter of indifference.

"How glad I am that the storm last night obliged you to sleep here!" exclaimed the smiling girl as he entered, next morning, the little breakfast-room, cheered by the brilliant sunshine which so often succeeds a hurricane,—as though the weather had spoken its mind, and was better. "How *very* glad I am!—that is, if no serious accident has occurred," was an emendation produced by the reproving looks of her astonished aunt.

Mrs. Barrington was evidently afraid Lord Clandon might interpret in his own favour the beaming countenance and bold self-gratulation of poor Maria. But Miss Brenton's candour soon set the matter in its true light.

"We have heard from Heriford Castle at last!" resumed she, as soon as their guest had taken his place at the breakfast-table, opposite the seat waiting for her uncle, who was still occupied in his early perambulation of the farm. "My aunt has received a long, long letter; and Charles refers to so many people of whom we know nothing, that your aid is wanting to explain all we cannot understand. But, in the first place——"

"In the first place, my dear Maria, pray make us some tea," interrupted Mrs. Barrington, apprehensive of what she might be about to communicate.

"I was only going to observe," resumed Miss Brenton, placing, in her absence of mind, more than double the usual allowance of tea in the teapot, and mistaking green for black, "that Charles certainly does not seem half so much infatuated as he was, by the beauty of Miss Maitland. Will you believe that he talks much more of Lady Alicia de Capell."

"I could have predicted *that*, without seeing the letter!" replied Lord Clandon, unable to avert his eyes from the bright and flower-like face before him, waking into the world with the joyousness of a happy child. "I foresaw that Barrington was near the close of his delusions; for before we left town, my mother engaged young Newbury,

the duke of Huntingfield's grandson, to join the party at the castle."

"But why should *that* alter my cousin's admiration of Miss Maitland?" rejoined the matter-of-fact Maria.

"Because in *his* case, Barrington was likely to believe what, in that of a boor such as I am, he could not bring himself to credit; namely, that the fair Eleanor (as they call one who is one of the *least* fair of her sex!) was making her flirtation with *him* a blind to more serious designs against myself."

A cry of indignation escaped the lips of Miss Brenton. But it was against the vanity of her informant. Had he, indeed, the folly to suppose he could be preferred to her cousin?

"She attempted a skirmish against me in London," added his lordship, persisting with a laughing face, in his calumnies. "But *there* I escaped her. *There* she found it would not do; whereas, at Greensells, she fancied it would be easy to run me to earth. A shy fellow, avowedly averse to women's society (as it is constituted in the fashionable world), has no chance in a country-house, where three meals a-day place him at the mercy of the enemy."

"And you really fancy that *you* were her object?" cried Maria, scarcely able to resist her inclination to tell him her opinion of his presumption.

"Not I! The future marquissate of Heriford was the thing; and the fact was as apparent to Charles Barrington as myself, long before the Greensells party broke up."

"This is the most unaccountable story!" murmured Maria to herself. "But if aware that he was indifferent to her, why did he accompany them to Heriford Castle?"

"Time will show!" said the earl, replying to a question that was not addressed to him. "But what more natural than that a pleasure-lover, like Barrington, should prefer a house full of company, and mirth, and feasting, to a quiet spot like this—abounding in happiness, indeed, but in happiness unaccordant with his tastes?" Maria was sorrowfully silent.

"But before Mr. Barrington comes in to demand our sympathy for his oats and clover," resumed Lord Clandon

with a smile, "what further do you want to know about the people staying at the castle?"

In vain did Mrs. Barrington interpose to reproach her niece with indiscretion, for having alluded to the contents of Charles's letter. Lord Clandon chose to be questioned. One of Maria's great charms, in his eyes, consisted in the total absence of conventional tact. He loved her for being free from the cant of worldly righteousness, and the jargon of worldly fashion. Disgusted, from his boyhood upwards, by the hypocrisies of the *beau monde*, the beauty of an angel would have made no impression on his heart, if accompanied by symptoms of the trammelling of fashionable art.

"In the first place, then, tell me *who* are the Kilsythes?" said she; after venturing a glance through the open case-ment, to ascertain that her uncle was not yet at hand.

"It would be easy to suspend your inquiry by a single word," was his prompt reply. "But I would rather enlighten your mind about them than merely answer, that Lord Kilsythe is my mother's brother."

"I warned you, Maria!" said Mrs. Barrington, with a heightened colour.

"But Charles said not a word against them, dear aunt?" pleaded Miss Brenton.

"It would be difficult," resumed Lord Clandon, cheerfully; "for I am proud to say, that my uncle is one of the worthiest as well as most agreeable men in the kingdom; clever too, as far as regards what I consider the best of cleverness; the power of self-government in public and private life, and making the best of himself and all who belong to him—or rather, of all who belong to him and himself—for the precept of 'love thyself least!'—so hard to accomplish—comes easy in *his* case."

"And is there a Lady Kilsythe?"

"You ask as anxiously as if desirous to know whether the post of wife to such a man were vacant?" said Lord Clandon, with a good-natured smile. "And well you may, for he is as exemplary a husband as in all the other relations of life. There *is* a Lady Kilsythe, however, and one every way deserving of him; except on one unlucky point, for she will die and leave the world no copy. They have no children. My grandmother, the Dowager Lady Kilsythe,

is still alive; but she, I am certain, is not staying at the Castle."

This circumstantial evidence afforded great comfort to Maria, who had fancied, from the enthusiasm with which both Lord Clandon and her cousin's letter spoke of "the Kilsythes," that they must possess a legion of pretty daughters.

"And who are Mr. and Lady Barbara Bernardo?" said she.

"Those people at Heriford Castle?" exclaimed Lord Clandon in his turn.

"Charles speaks of them as just arrived."

"Bernardo is a fellow with whom my brother Henry became intimate at Eton. His father, or grandfather, was a Jew,—a stockbroker,—share-agent, something connected with the money-market;—or, as Henry used to call him, one of the money-changers driven out of the temple; and Jew is still inscribed as legibly in Bernardo's face and costume, as nature and his tailor can write it."

"Even if Christianized for a generation or two, such people are apt to be over-dressed," observed Mrs. Barrington.

"And as abject in their ideas, as offensive in their appearance," added Lord Clandon. "Bernardo had the cunning to render himself useful to certain of his old schoolfellows, by whom, on his *début* in London life, he was pushed in society; till, last year, Lord Outatelbows, a connection of ours, consented to give him his daughter, and all the rest of the family, of course, their acquaintance."

"You do not give a very flattering account of the party," said Mrs. Barrington, a little startled by his severity.

"I will make it as *flattering* as you please: Miss Brenton asked me for a true one," replied the earl.

"And Lord Newbury, of whom you were speaking just now?" inquired Maria.

"Is what I then told you,—eldest son of the eldest son of the Duke of Huntingfield."

"And nothing more?"

"Nothing more! But most people think that enough. An heir-apparent to a wealthy dukedom, whether attached to some foreign embassy, or placed in the guards to be

unwhelped, or allowed the run of his grandfather's racing stables before he is breeched, or crammed for parliament by a private tutor, and dwarfed in his puppyhood by overdoses of learning, as terriers and tigers by gin,—is always a very great man!"

"To what dukedom, then, is Lord Mortayne heir-apparent?" inquired Maria, hastily, for she heard her uncle's highlows creaking in the hall.

"Mortayne!—To none!—Mortayne is simply one of our oldest barons. But who has been talking to you about Mortayne?"

"My cousin mentions that he is expected at the castle," said Maria, hastily,—for Mr. Barrington's hand was now on the handle of the door.

"Mortayne at the castle?—Mortayne again a guest, at my father's?" reiterated Lord Clandon,—though his host was already in the room, and commencing his chapter of grievances concerning the mischiefs effected by the storm.

"Then I shall have to join this confounded party at last!"

To account for the emotion betrayed by one habitually so undemonstrative, we must recede a step or two into the mysteries of the London season.

CHAPTER VIII.

Some rumour, also, of some strange adventures

Had gone before him, and his wars, and loves;

And as romantic heads are pretty painters,

And, above all, an Englishwoman's roves

Into the excursive, breaking the indentures

Of sober reason wheresoe'er it moves,

He found himself exceedingly the fashion;

Which serves our thinking people for a passion.—BYRON.

ABOUT a fortnight previous to the farewell *fête* at Heriford House and at some six of the clock,—for in dealing with a world so compounded of pride, pomp, and circumstance as that of fashion, much may depend upon the minuting of an hour,—a sallow-looking individual, who in country

life would have passed for five and forty, but who, among the parboiled visages of the *beau monde*, was readily guessed at his real age of thirty-four, lounged leisurely across St. James's Street on his way from Fenton's Hotel to White's.

The whirl of carriages which had been distracting the street throughout the day, was just then somewhat appeased by the translation of man and beast, coach, chariot, and brougham, to the drive in Hyde Park. Nothing was to be seen on the *pavé* but the stray barouche of some fashionable duchess, too delicate to attempt the great labour of female life—shopping—unless at an hour secure from collision with the horde of county baronets' wives, and other remorseless bargain hunters,—never so happy as when “tempted” by rolls of satin, or pieces of lace,—or the hack of some official man, gradually relaxing his grim visage from the plaits and puckers of business, in his transit between Whitehall and Hyde Park Corner, till qualified for companionship with the triflers who enable him to add nights of folly to his days of care. The ensign on guard was slowly creeping towards Grange's to modify, by a third ice within three hours, the influence of the red-hot pavement and his scarlet coat. The very bricklayers ascending with their hods the scaffolding of a new club-house (the natural growth of the soil of St. James's Street, as poplars of Lombardy, or cedars of Lebanon!) panted for breath,—languid under the influence of the atmosphere of July, in a district so over-paved and over-peopled.

“All as I left it,—all, to a hair, as I left it!” murmured the sallow man, glancing towards the gilded sofas and chairs of crimson damask, visible through the still open upper-windows of Crockford's, while, in the lower range, a gleam of white tablecloths announced that the dinner-hour of well-dining people was not far distant. “If ever there was a city that could be learned by rote, 'tis London! Sail for Peking,—mount your camel for Senegambia,—and you may calculate to a second whom you shall find in town on coming back;—whose charger will be crossing the bridge in Kensington Gardens,—whose family coach waiting at Howell and James's,—and who will have had the honour of entertaining ‘at their noble mansion the preceding day their royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, &c.

&c. &c. &c. &c.!' One might have a model made of this confoundedly little great metropolis, that would perform its petty routine, like the mechanical mice, and other interesting quadrupeds, furnished by Germany to our toy-shops!"

A *very* slow hackney chariot, the physiognomy of which he seemed to recognize as that of an old acquaintance, rumbled, at that moment, so deliberately past the crossing of Jermyn Street, as to enable him to pursue his lucubrations.

"Paris, that 'wilderness of monkeys,' I have found, at half a dozen intervals," mused he,

" 'Wearing strange shapes, and bearing many names,'

"dull, dirty, and exclusive under the Bourbons; vulgar and vivacious under the citizen king;—the place de Louis XV—XVI. Concord—Discord (what is it?) *now* a muddy morass, and *now* a glare of gilding. But London, *my* London, is London the immutable! Whether King or Queen be on the throne, let Whig or Tory hold the seals, the same soul-killing atmosphere weighs down soul and body! I could sketch to a wrinkle and a grey hair, the faces which another minute will bring before me in yonder window, plaster models of the wares within, like the wedding-cakes at Gunter's! There will be Old Vassall, unchanged in dress and feature since he came out of the ark! There will be Grose, with his scanty locks smoothed down in lines, as though he slept in a corduroy night-cap; and poor Brocas's rubicund face, which would make the fortune of the last new cookery-book by way of frontispiece."

For once, however, the shrewd interpreter of men and manners who was giving vent to these heresies of caste, was at odds with fact. On reaching the doorsteps of the club, and glancing through the panes of the *beau*-window which, even in the dog-days, are pretty sure to intervene betwixt the winds of heaven and the nobility of the well-preserved specimens of ancient art, all but permanent in their places,—the only objects that met his eye were the very slim person of a callow lordling, who, because unknown to *him*, he fancied unknown to fame; but whose claims to Whitehood he admitted at once, on hearing him afterwards made a butt of, under the name of "Newbury;"—and a

hook-nosed, black-whiskered individual, wearing an emerald pin the size of a water-melon, and a parti-coloured waistcoat that would have done honour to the premier *amoureux* of the Surrey theatre.

“Had I met the beast near the White Horse cellar with a lemon-net on his shoulder, instead of occupying the place I left filled by poor dear Shaversford, I should have known what to think of him;” resumed the individual, during whose absence from England the golden image of Meshech Bernardo had been set up by the better men, or betting men,—the betters who were his debtors. And with the customary inconsistency of human nature, he began to resent the very symptoms of change, after which for the last twenty minutes he had been repining! He was half disposed to pass the well-known steps, and proceed up Bond Street, on his solitary voyage of discovery.

But his face had been descried from the Hall by the veteran Joseph, who happened to be receiving a mysterious three-cornered note from a ticket-porter, to be delivered “werry part’clar, to Lord Noobry;” and the old man’s exclamation of surprise at suddenly beholding one of the most popular *habitués* of the club where, for three years past, he had not set his foot, was repeated from lip to lip, till all but the slim lord and black-whiskered nondescript, rushed forth to ascertain the truth.

“Mortayne!”—“Morty!”—“my dear Mortayne!” was reiterated in divers tones of wonder and delight by the owners of the brown brougham, the blue cabriolet, and the black pony, which looked as though moored in White’s Roads ever since Lord Mortayne took his departure, three years before. The first accused him of having stolen a march upon his friends,—the second of never having answered a single letter during his long absence—while the third kept grinning with such heartfelt and strenuous satisfaction at seeing him again, as to be unable to utter a word.

“You’ll find everything going on in the usual jogtrot way, Morty,” cried Lord Alfred, the proprietor of the brown brougham.

“You’ll find London, and everybody in it, confoundedly altered!” exclaimed, at the same moment, the owner of

the black pony ; while the warm-hearted master of the blue cab could only exclaim, " By Jove ! how glad I am to see you again ! Give us your hand, old fellow ! You *must* dine with us to-day."

As soon as the joyous barking of the three heads of the Cerberus of fashion would allow, Lord Mortayne threw himself into an arm-chair, for a more deliberate survey of his loving friends. But while listening to their somewhat less than civil interjections concerning the alteration of his own looks, it was impossible not, secretly, to return the compliment. Lord Alfred was grown seedy, Sir Alan Harkesley grey, and the cordial lord of the blue cabriolet, fat. All three were more than half-a-dozen years the worse for the three, to which the absence of Lord Mortayne had extended. Late hours and claret, smoking and a scold, had done the work of a seven-years' apprenticeship.

" But why did you never write, Morty ? " demanded the kindlier-hearted of the party, possessing himself of the arm-chair nearest Lord Mortayne.

" Because letters would have brought answers," sneered Lord Alfred, " and we all know, my dear Bowbridge, that to get through *your* hieroglyphics is harder work than sapping Hebrew for a fellowship."

" But now you *are* come, you mean, I suppose, to stay ? " resumed the first speaker, hoping that *this* time Mortayne would be allowed to answer for himself.

" Stay—where ? In London, now that half the world is at Cowes, and t'other half in training for the moors ? " cried Lord Alfred.

" And how did you like your tour, Morty ? " demanded in his turn Sir Alan Harkesley, much as he would have asked him how he liked the new ballet. " We none of us could ever make out what took you away in such a deuce of a hurry ! "

" I suppose you have seen Old Vassall ? " interrupted Lord Alfred. " But, perhaps, you did not know him, in the patent caoutchouc wig to which his grey hairs have been brought in sorrow at last ! "

" Do you remember that bay filly you sold to Hollingforth ? " interrupted, in his turn, Sir Alan,—not one of Lord Mortayne's three friends allowing him a second to

answer their idle questions. "I suppose you know that its brother won the Derby! Hollingforth had sold it, however, to a blackguard of a horse-dealer, before there was money to be made of it. But Hollingforth's dead now. Of course, you have heard *that*?"

"I should think he *was* dead!" added Lord Bowbridge; "Lady Mary is going to be married again, to some ensign in the Guards!"

"She was sure to marry again. Hollingforth left her every guinea he had in the world. By the way, Morty, you recollect the Welsh heiress that Sittingbourne proposed, to the year you left England? Think of his ill-luck! She turned out to be in a deep decline! What he used to call her delicate complexion was a deep decline. Well,—six months after she refused him, to marry a cousin of her own—(some snob of a country curate!)—she died, and made the happy man all the happier by six thousand a-year!"

"And you remember that beast of a fellow, Allcash, who, somehow or other, when the Duke and the Horse-guards were napping one day, got into the Blues, and was perpetually bragging about his father's Irish estates! He came to the devil of a crash last Ascot; for, after all, there was no father, and no Irish estates;—and the ready money we used to see him run through at hazard came from his mother, who was some Dublin sugar-baker's horrid widow. The Blues were glad enough to hush up the affair; and the fellow (whom *I*, from the first, pronounced to be a vulgar dog) was blown to—no matter where. The best part of the business was, however, that Jack Spilsby, that knowing lad of Lady Susan's, got the cornetcy, and is now the smartest officer in the regiment."

"But why don't you tell him about Lady Susan's *own* show-up?" spitefully suggested Lord Alfred.

"Where is the use of talking about such a woman as *that*? One has been hearing stories about *her* ever since one was born. I remember having to fight her brother at Eton, for repeating some foolish paragraph about her out of the *Age*. If Morty wants scandal, the best thing we've had this season is Sir Bruce's business; only the bloom is off the plum by its having been pawed about in the newspapers."

“ You forget that Sir Bruce is his cousin ? ”

“ *Raison de plus*, that he should be glad to hear him abused ! But talking of your cousins, Morty, you know, of course, that the two pretty little Trevors are married ? and tolerably well, too, for beauties. Professed beauties usually make *fiasco*.”

“ I don't see that the ugly ones do better ! ” retorted Lord Alfred. “ Witness the four faces yonder in Lady Heriford's family coach : Lady Alicia and Lady Mary gazing as vacantly at our sacred windows, as if staring the sea out of countenance from the Brighton Parade ! ”

“ None of them yet disposed of ? ” said Lord Mortayne, in a languid tone, though it was the first word he had bestowed on his *soi-disant* friends. “ But there seems to be a new face in the carriage ; and I don't recollect that the Herifords had a *fifth* daughter.”

“ Nor, if they had, was she likely to show such features as those your quick eye caught a glimpse of ! I knew Alfred was about as right as he usually is, when he pretended to see Lady Mary.”

“ Oh ! it was Miss Maitland, was it ? ” drawled Lord Alfred, to whom the change was a matter of little moment. “ One woman, unless one happens to be in love with her, is much the same as another. Not to *you*, though, Morty ; for the fair Eleanor is new since your time, and a deuced pretty girl, too,—though out of my line. A girl with fifty thousand pounds can't afford to flirt, except for *le bon motif* ; and a younger brother, like myself, can't afford, as times go, to marry a girl with only fifty thousand pounds.”

“ I don't know a more expensive thing than a girl with fifty thousand pounds,” added Sir Alan Harkesley, as sententiously as if uttering an aphorism. “ She expects to have her whole income for pocket-money, and is sure to have been three times as extravagantly brought up as the daughter of a duke.”

“ But how comes it,” inquired Lord Mortayne, “ that Lady Heriford, who knows better what she is about, and what other people are about, than most women, undertakes to chaperon so pretty girl, by way of foil to her frights ? ”

“ You forget, my dear fellow, that she is the mother of sons as well as daughters.”

"Clandon must be amazingly altered since I left England, if he is to be had for either love or money!" retorted Lord Mortayne, shrugging his shoulders.

"One never knows what will be the end of a fellow so unlike the rest of the world. People who waste their lives in ringing every shilling that comes into their hands, for fear of getting a bad one, are often imposed upon by a piece of brass, which they mistake for gold."

"But it can't be for Clandon, Lady Heriford is making up to Miss Maitland," interposed the more candid owner of the blue cabriolet. "There is Henry to be provided for,—Henry, who is her favourite; and I dare say, if he were to make a tolerable match, old Heriford would bring him into Parliament, and do something handsome for him. At Kilsythe's death, you know, Henry de Capell comes in for the barony and estates."

A yawn, perpetrated by Lord Alfred, having evinced that, to one of the party at least, this *resumé* of the history of the Heriford family was not particularly entertaining, the owner of the blue cab glanced at the clock, and perceiving that it wanted but a quarter to seven, an hour at which "everybody" would be leaving the park (after which thinning out of the wood, those who are above being comprehended in the sweeping clause become visible and approachable), proposed to Mortayne to accompany him.

"Dine with me you must and shall," said he. "But we don't sit down till half-past eight, and I will drop you at Fenton's to dress, on my way home from the park."

Weary from his recent journey, and languid from previous indisposition, Mortayne would have been better pleased with bachelor's fare and a lounge over the newspapers, till dinner-time. But, in London, the last new-comer is never his own master.

"Better wear off the gloss of my novelty at once!" mused he. "One's popularity does not outlast a couple of days, at this time of year. When they have all stared and ejaculated at me, I shall be left to do as I like."

Lord Mortayne was certainly justified in a low estimate of the warmth of human friendship in the set of people to which he belonged, by the fact that, of the three inmates who had already accosted him, not one evinced the slightest

interest in his travels, or attempted the smallest inquiry concerning an illness he had undergone in the East, so severe, as to have caused a well accredited account of his death to be circulated in the papers.

But none knew better than himself that, among what tradesmen and footmen call "leaders of *ton*," a man is good only for his price current on the fashionable exchange; that if clipped by the Jews, he loses so much in value; and that small change to his full amount is always acceptable in his stead.

Endowed with talents which, in an humbler sphere, might have raised him to the highest, or, in his own, if properly applied, have conferred blessings on the country, Lord Mortayne had exhausted in boyhood the enjoyments of a riper age; till, on attaining his majority, nothing but excess sufficed to excite his vitiated palate.

But even during the process of squandering his fortune, his health, his respectability, his talents, the consciousness of evil doing had impeded his finding the same blind joy in vice and folly, which they supplied to the blockheads his companions. Even in the hey-day of his rouéism, when stimulated by royal example, and sunned in the favour of beauty, his shallow-minded, shallow-hearted associates often whispered that there was "something odd about Mortayne."

But though his oddity, *i.e.*, his superiority to the paltry career which he had chosen chiefly for the sake of thwarting the severe and penurious guardian whose authority represented that of his long-deceased parents, occasionally tempted him to extricate himself from the shallow waters, so often degenerating into mud, where he could neither sink nor swim, and attempt a better progress upon dry land,—the mistrust arising from the notoriety of his habits drove him back to conceal himself among the sedges. The world found it difficult to believe that one who had acted so foolishly could be other than a fool. While his sallies were cited for their wit, their wisdom passed unnoticed, as the aim of the bullet is overlooked in the vividness of the flash by which its impetus is created.

At length, circumscribed in fortune, and impaired in health, the loss of that buoyancy of youth which assigns to the air we breathe the consistency of a lighter element, left

Mortayne the same listless, discontented mortal, that it leaves so many of his caste. Too poor to hunt, too gouty to drink, too idle to work for the favour of society, too proud to accept it as a boon, he looked round him at thirty years of age, and discovered, beyond the possibility of mistake; that all was vanity and vexation of spirit;—vanity on the part of others, vexation on his own.

At the moment of making the discovery, he would have been thankful to any indifferent person to walk upon his foot in the lobby of the opera, as a pretext for killing or being killed. But Mortayne was a man still too much sworn *by* in the great world, to be sworn *at* in the little. His fractiousness was allowed ample space for its antics. He might, in short, be *bored* to death; but it was his only chance of release.

At length, while communing in his chamber, or rather chambers, in the Albany, it occurred to him by an effort, which, in any other man, would have been a proof of weakness of mind, but which in *his* case proved only the strength of those cobweb filaments constituting the bondage of fashionable life, that there was a world elsewhere than the world of clubs and coteries.

“Though a poor man in England,” mused he, “I should be rich in any other country. Though unable to stand claret and champagne, in other lands a man may live with his like without making himself a beast. Paris, Naples, and Vienna, are only London made effervescent. But I must go further. A new aspect of nature and human nature will give a fillip to my jaded spirits. And when she finds me gone in earnest, she will seek happiness in other resources.”

Passports and patent portmanteaus were easily obtained; and a cast to the Mediterranean would have been no hard matter to secure, in these yachting times, for so popular a man. But he had wisely determined to avoid the idle remonstrances of his friends by abstaining from all intimation of his projects.

“Clamour they must,” said he to himself, “but let it be when they find that I am gone. Some will say I am ruined;—some will say I am mad;—that going abroad has been prescribed by my physician or my man of business, for retrenchment or change of air;—that I have promised to bury

myself in seclusion till my constitution or my estate comes round! No matter! Except *her*, poor girl, not a soul of them would care if I were to throw myself into La Trappe; and how can I blame them, seeing how fully the compliment is returned!"

But, however much they might have objected to his plans the preceding week, when seeing him in his usual place in the omnibus-box at the Opera, and his usual place on his bay hack under the elms beside the Serpentine, they had a right to expect to see him throughout the remainder of that and all other seasons, on finding that he was gone—really gone—his very chambers and horses disposed of, his popularity rose a hundred per cent. in a night!

Had he intended to proceed no further than Paris, White's would have contented itself with finding out that it could better spare a better man; that Morty was an irreparable loss. But when it appeared that he had blown up the bridge behind him—that he meditated an absence of years—that he was bound for Egypt and the East—they set no bounds to their lamentations.

"Morty was the best fellow in the world! With all his wit, Morty never said an ill-natured thing; with all his fastidiousness, never did an ill-natured one. Morty had never been any man's enemy but his own. It was too bad of him to give his friends the slip, without a word of warning! If he was out at elbows, which of them was not ready to come forward for him? If he was out of spirits, which of them would not have been glad to help him get up the steam?"

Some said he was only hypped; some that his constitution was broken up. But the greater number were of opinion that he had "never been the same man since the Christmas party at Heriford Castle."

At the close of nine days, however, their vulgar wonder was at an end; and at the close of nine months, they had ceased to notice his absence. Let who *will* die, or depart, the space he vacates in London life does not remain many days untenanted; and as Morty refrained from writing to stir up from time to time the decaying embers of his popularity, he was forgotten in favour of those who were on the spot to invent new martingales, or guard-chains, or hunting-waistcoats; or win a steeple-chase at the risk of their necks,

or assign a nick-name at the hazard of a duel. The wrong things he had done were obliterated by wilder doings; the good things he had said effaced by things that were better.

The traveller, in the interim, was gathering the full fruition of his plans. Stripped of the conventional importance attached, in London, to his well-known name (that coterie renown which, extending little beyond the limits of May Fair, *in* May Fair appears so mighty!), he found he must work his way to whatever consideration he wished to obtain in those countries where an English bagman and English peer are alike addressed as "*Milordo*."

Even when money might have availed to purchase consequence, his retinue was not of sufficient splendour to command attention. But there were days and days, and leagues and leagues, where the wealth of a Rothschild would have done little in his favour, unless accompanied with the philosophy that could resist privation, and the intelligence that could turn scanty resources to account.

Compelled to brace up his courage and exercise his faculties for the encounter of difficulty and danger, he accordingly became a wiser and a better man. The littleness of all he had been tempted to overrate in London was soon apparent, when viewed from without that artificial atmosphere, which has the property of magnifying the objects viewed through its medium.

Lord Mortayne had almost brought himself to disbelieve, while grovelling amid the pigmy population of St. James's, that there existed a world elsewhere. But a three years' pilgrimage in Europe, Africa, and Asia, sufficed to undeceive him. He was aware, however, that his discoveries would be of small account, unless the better frame of mind they had served to engender should survive his return to his native land, and his release from the fooldom of Fashion.

CHAPTER IX.

Le cœur de l'homme est plein d'oubli,
 C'est une eau qui remue et ne garde aucun pli.
 L'herbe pousse moins vite aux pierres de la tombe
 Qu'un autre amour dans l'âme ; et la larme qui tombe
 N'est pas séchée encore que la bouche sourit,
 Et qu'aux pages du cœur un autre nom s'écrit.—GAUTIER.

To proceed straight into Westmoreland, in the lake district of which county he possessed a small estate, which constituted the most valuable part of his diminished fortunes, had been the purpose of Lord Mortayne on reaching London. Arriving at the end of the season and the most stifling period of the year, he had little inclination to reknit the brittle ties which had formerly united him with the glories of the great world of that sultry metropolis.

But so strong is the force of habit, that no sooner had he set foot on the pavement which was to *him* as his mother earth, than he must needs select his caravanserai in his beloved St. James's Street ; and once there, and within sight of White's, to abstain from inquiring who was dead and who alive, who married or who divorced, of his old associates, was a stretch of ingratitude beyond his reach.

On issuing from the door of Fenton's, his feet took their instinctive way toward his club ; and there he became as naturally the denizen of Lord Bowbridge's cab, and as speedily involved in the vortex of fashionable folly, as though such had been expressly his aim.

"Morty!—Mortayne!—dear Morty come back again," was echoed as eagerly by fifty pair of lips in Hyde Park, as by three, an hour before. Inquiring faces were seen peering anxiously from broughams, britszkas, and chariots, to ascertain whether the sallow, languid-looking man, reclining beside Lord Bowbridge's replete form, were really the once-worshipped individual after whom, and at whom, both man and woman used to dress, only three years before. A few slim lordlings, such as young Newbury, and a few blooming girls, such as Eleanor Maitland, whispered, however, with

an air of surprise and disappointment,—“And is *that* the famous Lord Mortayne?”

In the blue eyes of the latter the phrase was in fact so legibly inscribed, when, on catching sight of him near the Serpentine, laughing and talking with a group of noble equestrians, Lady Heriford, usually so guarded in her movements, stopped her family coach so as to compel Lord Bowbridge to draw up, that she might be the first to congratulate the return of one whom she had been a principal cause of driving into exile,—that Lord Mortayne himself could hardly refrain from a smile.

Too well versed in his *La Bruyère* to be ignorant that “a middle-aged man, who wants to ascertain the changes that time may have wrought in his person, has only to consult the eyes of the first young girl to whom he is presented,” he whispered within himself, while acknowledging, by a courteous bow, the introduction effected by the marchioness to her young companion,—“Since I am grown so old and ugly, I may certainly allow myself to accept her ladyship’s invitation. A week or two spent at Heriford Castle, on my way to the north, may now be enjoyed without danger to myself or other people.”

Before he quitted the park, numberless other invitations were forced upon him; for, coming at the close of the season when every novelty had been exhausted, Mortayne was quite a godsend! Everybody was “dying” to hear his account of his travels. Everybody was “dying” to be the first to seize upon him, for breakfast, dinner, or supper;—to do the honours of London to *him* who had done them so long, and do the honours of *him* to London, to which he had long been so dear. Those who were going to Cowes, insisted that his shattered health would be only restored by yachting. Those who were bound for Brighton, protested that sea-bathing was the one thing needful; and when he pleaded that his cruise in the Mediterranean had done him more harm than good, all who were on the eve of departure for their country-seats endeavoured to bribe him to become their guest by offers of grouse, partridge, or pheasant shooting,—fishing and hunting,—billiards or lansquenets.

For a moment, the man so used up, or down, aforetime, by the wear and tear of fashionable life, felt almost flurried

by what so nearly resembled cordiality. He began to think that, during his absence, his loving country-people must have improved; that they were growing a little warmer, a little less listless and inane. It required a more extended *connaissance de cause* to apprise him that the season had been an unusually dull one;—that there had been very few illustrious strangers, or suffocating *fêtes*;—not so much as a turbaned Imaum, or Bengal merchant-prince, to excite the cupidity of countesses by their show of cachemires, or afford an excuse for raising the price of opera-boxes.

A few days, however, served to satisfy him that the enthusiasm lavished on him would have been bestowed fifty-fold on a Chinese mandarin or captive warrior of Scinde; and, before the end of the week, he found himself verging so rapidly towards the torpor of misanthropic *ennui* which had driven him forth into the wilderness, that, breaking hurriedly through a hundred engagements, he thanked Providence for the merciful institution of railroads; and, within twelve hours, was two hundred miles distant from town.

Meanwhile, the impression made by his transit through the world of fashion, as well as the mysterious “poor girls!” and other sentimental allusions by which we have endeavoured to awaken the interest of the reader, will be best explained by a conversation that occurred on the subject, during the first week of Charles Barrington’s sojourn at Greensells.

It had not needed many days’ domestication under the same roof with Miss Maitland, to enable him to detect, by those trifling indications which are

“To the lover confirmation strong
As proofs of holy writ,”

that the object of the fair Eleanor in her visit to Buckinghamshire was not, as he had once fancied, the bold heir-apparent of Easton, but the shy heir-apparent of Greensells. By that polestar were her movements, unquestionably, steered; and though, with all his skill in interpreting the less worthy motives of human action, he was unable exactly to surmise to what part of her plan of conquest he had been made to minister, it was so clear that she had acted without the

slightest regard to his feelings, as to convert his prepossessions in her favour to the bitterness of gall.

No human being more contemptible in the eyes of a man than the coquette of whom he has been the tool: and when, towards the close of Charles's visit, he found that Lady Heriford's opinion of his consequence was greatly enhanced by an allusion to his near connexion with a man so influential in public life as Lord Coylsfield, and his hint that he had been educated at the cost of a nabob-uncle at Madras, who had no son of his own, so that his heirship to the Easton estates was a secondary consideration,—he took the initiative against being openly thrown over by the artful Eleanor, by transferring his attentions to the less fair, but far more distinguished-looking Lady Alicia de Capell, by whom they were most auspiciously accepted; and thenceforward made it his object to obtain, by the most obsequious homage to the marchioness, an invitation to accompany the family to Heriford Castle.

He had two objects in view, *i. e.*, to frustrate those of the woman by whom he had been injured, and prove to the world that it needed only his own consent to obtain the hand of Lady Alicia. Armed with such a certificate of consequence, he fancied he might venture to show himself once more in those brilliant circles, where, as the *congédié* of Sir Wolseley Maitland's sister, he could never have ventured to appear again.

From the moment a definite shape was given to his ambitions, Charles Barrington never fluctuated. Love may vacillate, but hate knows its own mind. The Marchioness of Heriford must be conciliated in his favour—no matter *who* might take offence. Not all the sneers of Sir Wolseley—not all the giddy laughs of Lady Mary de Capell, could chill the assiduity with which he followed her with her camp-stool whenever she chose to stroll through the shrubberies; or obtained permission to accompany her in her phaëton, after luncheon;—the place by her side being as carefully eschewed by all the rest of the party, as is usually the case where the ladyship to be “aired” with is dunny, and the country dull.

Aware that a good luncheon and a couple of glasses of sherry afford an infallible pass-key to the elderly female

heart, Charles Barrington was not sorry to profit by the only hour of the day that tended to place him behind the scenes of a theatre, of which he had hitherto witnessed only the full-dress performances. By such means, he learned to appreciate the anxieties of the marchioness concerning the representation of the county of Bucks. It was essential, he found, that Lord Clandon should be returned, because their snug little family borough in the north was wanted for Lord Henry.

“With four daughters to establish,” her ladyship observed, “it was essential that their parliamentary influence should be made the most of.”

Unaccustomed to study the ways and means of aristocratic life, Charles was for a moment half tempted to inquire, whether it was in Church or State the interests of the Ladies De Capell were to be advanced? But the recollection that, in the palmy days of Versailles (which those of triumphant Toryism so closely resemble), the daughter of a favourite courtier used to receive a regiment for her dowry, or secure a receivership-general to her bridegroom—he began to see, that if Lady Blanche contrived to net a certain young diplomat belonging to the Greensells party, on whom she was untirable in inflicting her proficiencies as a linguist, the family interest would be taxed, to eke out her ten thousand pounds, by getting him made *chargé-d'affaires* at Washington or Copenhagen; or that a stall or stole might hereafter be obtained for the honourable and reverend madcap, whom, previous to her flirtation with Sir Wolseley, Lady Mary had been forbidden to encourage, because his father, the Earl of Greatithe, could give him only a younger brother's portion, *i.e.* a living of eight hundred a-year.

“In point of fact,” added the marchioness, whose apparently slumberous *bein-être* had perhaps its eyes wider open than young Barrington had the wit to perceive—“in point of fact, the marriage-portions of the daughters of a house like ours constitute the smallest part of their dowry. Their connection with so many families brilliantly established secures them a pleasant and varied existence; and if, following the dictates of their hearts, they choose to marry into a sphere less elevated than their own, it

needs only the exercise of Lord Heriford's influence to replace them where they ought to be."

With a well-disciplined air of deference, Charles Barington assured his portly companion, that, brought up like the Ladies De Capell, a woman was a dowry in herself.

"As I always said," rejoined the marchioness, having recovered her breath, exhausted by previous longwindedness, "at the time Lord Mortayne was paying attention to Sophia, the winter before he quitted England, and every one was surprised at my tolerating a man notoriously half ruined,—*Mortayne est du bois dont on fait les hommes d'état!*—Mortayne possesses rank and talent. Hitherto he has chosen to be a man of pleasure, and has topped his part. Had he any inducement to become a man of business, he would distinguish himself as much in public, as heretofore in fashionable life."

Her young auditor was bold enough to stammer a remark, that "surely the two careers required a somewhat different apprenticeship!"

No. Lady Heriford could not agree with him. "A peer of the realm, like Lord Mortayne, commenced his political education from the moment he had ears to hear. In the society in which he lived, politics formed the staple of conversation; and with faculties so brilliant as those of the individual in question, even the idlest day of his life afforded a lesson. She had thought, at the time to which she was alluding, and was still of opinion, that though, had he married Lady Sophia, they could scarcely have made up, between them, two thousand five hundred a-year (which, with a certain rank to be kept up, might be called beggary), Lord Mortayne would have instantly obtained a footing in political life; where, when the exigencies of a family compelled him to exert those excellent abilities which at present profited him so little, his fortune must have been made."

"It was from insufficiency of means, then, that the match went off?" insinuated Charles; who, till that moment, had never heard a syllable about the matter.

"I can hardly say that it went *off*, for officious friends took care that it should never come *on!*" replied the communicative marchioness. "Lord Mortayne was one of the intimates of our set. For years and years,—from the time

of his coming of age, in short, and long before even Alicia was out, he used to come and stay with us during the hunting season. So that it appeared unlikely enough that either of the girls, accustomed to see him from their childhood, should trouble their heads about him; especially as he was not what is called a ladies' man,—or, more properly, not what can be called a *marrying* man. But alas! at the moment of my second daughter's introduction into society, he spent his usual Christmas holidays with us; and was found so agreeable by Sophia, that most of our friends looked upon it as a match: some, wondering at our sanction,—some, surprised that a girl with all her prospects before her should take a fancy to a broken-down *roué*."

"I have heard Lord Mortayne described as the most charming man in the world!" said Charles, seeing that an answer was expected.

"Charming is the precise word! Where he wishes to please, he is irresistible; high bred without *hauteur*, and brilliant without pretension."

"Lady Sophia then——"

"Lady Sophia made no *show* of her partiality. Educated as my daughters have been, it would have been strange if she *had*. But, by ill luck, our party broke up suddenly, before the young people came to an understanding. One of Lord Heriford's tiresome nieces, who, by way of parading her domestic virtues, never travels without her nursery, brought the scarlet fever into the house; but for which, Mortayne would certainly have proposed, and, probably, been accepted. But on getting back to town, some one put it into his head, either that an attempt had been made to 'catch' him (a vulgar phrase, which has done more harm in certain circles than people suppose!), or that he was unfit for the regular life of a married man; for, on our arrival in London, a month afterwards, fully expecting that the affair would be brought to a crisis, Lord Mortayne was gone."

"Gone?"

"Actually on his way to Alexandria!"

"Shameful!" ejaculated Charles, in the tone he fancied was expected of him.

"So many people thought, so a few people *said*; though,

in fact, he had done only what is done, year after year, by half the young men about town."

"Lord Mortayne was not so *very* young!" hazarded Charles. "He was old enough to know better."

"Exactly Clandon's opinion. My son was abroad at the time. But on his return to England, when it was hinted to him that the loss of health and spirits of his favourite sister was attributable to disappointed attachment, I never saw a man more indignant."

"Lucky, perhaps, that Mortayne had quitted England."

"No! Clandon exhibited his usual solid sense; sifted the business to the bottom; made the most minute inquiries; and finding that Lord Mortayne had paid no other attentions to his sister than such as are authorized by the existing forms of society, was too wise to draw the attention of the world to her disappointment by a show of groundless resentment. A duel on such grounds, in *our* position of life, is almost as injurious as a suit for breach of promise of marriage, in a lower."

A little relieved by learning the exact extent to which it was permissible to flirt with one of the Ladies de Capell without being called to account, Charles Barrington observed that he had often noticed, on the part of Lord Clandon towards Lady Sophia, attentions he was little in the habit of paying.

"Yes, they are better friends than the rest. They perfectly understand each other. Both are shy; both averse to the gay world. But Clandon, though reserved, is a young man of the firmest character, as well as the highest principles," added her ladyship (beginning to address one of the free and independent electors of the county of Bucks!), "a young man who is likely to win the confidence of the country the moment he takes part in political life. In another year or two, when he will probably be established at Greensells, as a married man and the representative of the county, his responsibilities in public and private life will compel him to do himself justice."

An air of gratified conviction pervaded the countenance of her auditor.

"Did I not understand your ladyship," inquired he, carelessly, and by no means as if angling for a renewal of

his invitation, "that Lord Mortayne was about to join you in the North?"

"Yes. Lord Heriford and myself judged it better to mark the absence of all resentment, by meeting him on his return from abroad as if nothing had happened; and as he used to visit us on his way to Mortayne Manor, I invited him to come as usual. After a lapse of three or four years, no fear of a relapse on either side," added the marchioness, with a grim smile; "and he is a man one really cannot afford to lose, when he *is* come-at-able! Nothing like him in a country-house! Nothing like him, in fact, anywhere! You know him, of course?"

"Not beyond a bowing acquaintance, from having met him at dinner at Sir Alan Harkesley's," replied Charles, with a becoming air of modesty. "When Lord Mortayne quitted England, I had scarcely left Eton."

"True, very true! Your contemporary, Henry, was a mere schoolboy; or he would, perhaps, have taken matters less temperately than his brother. Henry has more of *my* nature in him than his father's. Henry acts first, and thinks afterwards. Henry is as quick as gunpowder."

"The noblest and most generous fellow in the world!" cried her companion, with becoming enthusiasm; "no one who has the happiness of calling Lord Henry de Capell 'friend,' but would go through fire and water to do him service."

"But since you are unacquainted with Lord Mortayne, my dear Mr. Barrington," said Lady Heriford, responding to her own train of reflections, rather than to his observation,—"you really *ought* to be presented to him. I scarcely know so perfect a model of deportment, to propose to a young man. Why not join our party at Heriford Castle? Henry will be back from the moors by that time. Henry will meet us there."

Enchanted at this prompt fulfilment of his hopes, Charles Barrington was beginning a speech of grateful acquiescence, when a sudden thought brightened the pasty countenance which the gradual evaporation of the effects of the sherry was beginning to leave vacant.

"Clandon informed me, just before luncheon," added her ladyship, "that instead of accompanying us, as he

intended, he thinks it advisable to remain at Greensells a month or six weeks longer, to follow up his canvass."

"Exactly the course which my father took the liberty of suggesting to the marquis!" added Charles, with humble deference.

"And as he will be a sad loss to his father, to whom his attentions are, everybody must admit, most laudable, it would really be an act of charity if you would accept the vacant seat in our carriage. The girls have their barouche. The Maitlands, who are to be with us a short time longer, travel together. It would be a charming surprise to them all, if you accepted Clandon's place."

No time for demur. On the morrow the party was to take its departure.

"Perhaps, when she sees that all hope of Lord Clandon is up for her," mused the elated Charles, while arranging his white cravat that day for dinner, after hearing the change of personages in the forthcoming drama formally announced to the family—"perhaps when she sees that a coronet is not so easily within her reach as she fancied, the consummate coquette will think it worth while to recommence her manœuvres! No, no! fair Eleanor! again and again, no! You have been pleased to teach me my first lesson in the worthlessness of womankind, *e tu me lo pagherai!* Many a tear do you owe me for the precious illusions I have lost. I could forgive her, had she been disgusted by the meanness of Easton. But that from the first her encouragement should have been a manœuvre, and that a mere *débutante* should have been so profoundly artful, proves, indeed, that *bon chien chasse de race*. Of the daughter of such a mother, what after all, was to be expected!"

CHAPTER X.

This castle hath a pleasant seat ; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.—SHAKSPEARE.

She was beloved, she loved ;—she is and doth ;
But still sweet love is food for fortune's tooth.—SHAKSPEARE.

IT has been often said and often written,—*too* often, perhaps, considering how few people gainsay the assertion, that the aristocratic life of England, as exhibited in its lordly halls and castles, is the noblest in Europe, and most enjoyable in the world.

The palaces of other capitals exceed those of London ; and few are the metropolitan mansions of our nobility that can vie with the old hotels of the *ancien régime entre cour et jardin* of the Faubourgs St. Honoré, or St. Germain ; the fine suburb residences of Vienna ; or the marble palaces of Italy. Of divers of the Italian cities, indeed, may be said, as by Madame de Stael, of Genoa, that “they seem built for a congress of kings.”

But neither Austria, nor Italy, nor France can boast of their Belvoirs, and Burghleys ; their Chatsworths, Longleats, Ickworths, Ashridges, Taymouths, or Eatons. Few foreign magnates, below the rank of royalty, could afford the establishment necessary to keep up these lordly halls with the order and splendour observable not alone in the few cited, but in hundreds and hundreds of noble residences of less pretence. Even were the revenues forthcoming, there were still wanting the pervading elegance, and refinement, and air of general well-being that arises, not only from centuries of civilization, but from the solicitude for the comfort of every individual, almost of every animal belonging to the household, indispensable to impart an air of decency and completeness to the whole.

Never had Lord Mortayne been so cognizant of all this, as on arriving at Heriford Castle. It was the first English country-house he had visited since his return from a tour that comprehended not alone the tents of Arabia, but those

princely abodes of the Hungarian and Polish nobility, occasionally cited as approaching nearest to our *vie de Château*; but which in truth, resemble it as nearly as the reverse of a Turkey carpet does the fairer side.

In former days, he had often joined in the outcry raised by the *blasés* and *ennuyés* of the great world, of—"When you have visited one of these houses, you have seen all of them! Always the same state-staircase,—grand gallery,—drawing-rooms hung with damask,—morning-rooms with chintz,—and dining-hall of carved oak; with the same service of plate, and side-board of gilt vases and salvers. Everywhere, the same questions on arriving, from the groom of the chambers,—the same dressing-bell,—the same morning hecatomb that makes one fancy one is dining by mistake. Everywhere the same Keepsake and Monsieur Vieuxbois, the same work-table, with crochet-work and netting boxes! Nay, we might almost add, the same string of fair young ladies in ringlets, and dark young ladies in *bandeaux*,—the same noisy fools knocking about the billiard balls,—and the same quiet couple fancying themselves invisible while flirting over the chess-table in the corner."

For in former days, the whole thing had become, by damnable iteration, stale and unprofitable. After discovering the hollowness of much of this golden hospitality, after learning by experience, the rashness of those who, like Sir Peter Teazle, leave their character behind them to be torn to pieces, on quitting a spot where people, like the houses of parliament, rule by division,—and above all, having had occasion in more than one noble mansion belonging to some intimate friend to reap the whirlwind from having sowed the wind, and be pricked by thorns of his own industrious planting,—jealousies created by his libertinism, or revilings produced by his infidelity,—he had quitted England less in conceit with

Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers, joined

By no quite lawful marriage of the arts;

Sad to a connoisseur, but when combined,

Forming a whole, irregular in parts,

But leaving grand impressions on the mind;—

with a legion of liveries in the hall,—and a world of white nightcaps administering to the patent stoves!

But the rubs of life had amended his perceptions. The progress of time rendered him doubly susceptible to the charm of the comfortable. The dirt he had eaten in foreign parts, and the strange bed-fellows with which travel had made him acquainted, taught him the value of English cleanliness; and as epicureanism, like fever, is always more pernicious in a relapse, there was some excuse for his deciding within himself that, had he a home like Heriford Castle, the busy haunts of men, and a considerable proportion of the men haunting them, might go to the devil.

“Had I not wasted my substance like an ass as I was,” mused he, as his travelling chariot crossed the drawbridge, “I would set up a quiet fire-side at Mortayne Manor for the remainder of my days, and leave it to younger men to play out the game.”

This apparent taming down of his philosophy, was, however, not a little at variance with the alteration achieved in his outward man, during the six weeks which had elapsed since his return to England. It was not alone that the air and generous diet of his native country had restored the hues of health to his cheek, and elasticity to his step. His dress was now scrupulously arranged according to the fashion of the day, and his shaggy hair and whiskers reclaimed to the most becoming form; the glossy beard which had won the admiration of the Levant, having wholly disappeared.

It is true that, on the eve of quitting town, his friends, Sir Alan and Lord Alfred, who, like himself, were equipping for the sporting season and taking their farewell dinner at White's, assured him, as friends are apt to do, that he had made an alteration for the worse; that now he was dressed like other people, crows-feet and grey hairs had become perceptible, which before escaped notice amidst the general disarray. One of them took occasion to point out that his hands had attained the complexion of a York-tan glove, under the scorching sun of the tropics; while the other inquired how he could be so rash as to leave town without consulting Paterson Clarke,—seeing that his teeth were beginning to look as blue as if conscious that, like a run on the bank, they required stopping.

These hints, however, had only the effect of sending the

relapsed dandy to spend an hour or two in Atkinson's shop, for the purchase of cosmetics and preventives; and his dressing-box was refurnished, to keep pace with the reformation of his wardrobe. For the atmosphere he had been imbibing since his return had done worse than the swamps of the Nile. The malaria of fashion had seized upon its victim. He was once more bound to a wheel, unending in its rotation as that of Ixion.

Any one to whom Lord Mortayne was intimately known,—had any one in the frivolous set of men and women in whom he lived been capable of perceiving the lights and shades of his character,—might have seen that, into all these preparations, all this elaboration of vanity, there entered a sort of pettishness. He dressed and curled his hair like a man who was angry. Was it the impertinence of such fellows as Lord Alfred and Sir Alan by which he was piqued? Was it the discovery that the Lady Susan, to whom, in wilder years, he had sacrificed so much of his time, money, and consideration, was throwing herself at the head of a vulgarian like Bernardo, that disposed him to demonstrate his personal superiority to the dressy offshoot of Israel? Was it that, on resuming his post of the olden time in the Omnibus Box, the *première danseuse* of the day, to whom his face was new, had been mystified by Lord Henry de Capell into believing him the father of Lord Newbury, come to take cognizance of her daring flirtation with the slimmest lordling of the *coulisses*?

No! it was nothing of the kind. At the ball so often adverted to—the fatal farewell ball at Heriford House—the only London *fête* at which Mortayne had been at the trouble of showing himself since his return, his chief solicitude was, to catch a glimpse of the innocent cause of his long expatriation. So little had his Heriford Castle flirtation with Lady Sophia de Capell come under the notice of the world, and so thoroughly was it now forgotten by the few who had ever suspected his momentary prepossession, that people answered his questions about her with perfect unreserve. Within a few days of his arrival in town, he had been told that, now her two younger sisters were out, she seldom went into society,—“because she was in bad health, or serious, or something of that sort;” and with the apti-

tude of man that is born of woman to make himself the hero of a romance, Mortayne, who had so often pondered with pity upon her preference, under the palm-trees of the East, instantly decided that she was the victim of a broken heart. Throughout the long years of his absence, she had doubtless been pining for him with a green and yellow melancholy, more flattering to *him* than becoming to herself.

He did not admit, indeed, that it was the desire to be an eye-witness of the havoc he had made which took him to the ball at Heriford House. But so it was. While assuring himself that, since the family, who had little cause to be in charity with him, thus cordially opened their arms, it was incumbent on him to rush into them; his sole motive for accepting the invitation was, to behold the wasted form of her who had abjured for his sake the pleasures of youth. He was not wholly unprepared for some demonstration in his favour. Lady Sophia de Capell was too well brought up to make a scene; but there would be no great harm if a bottle of Godfrey's salts were in requisition.

But the high-bred and amiable girl who, at seventeen, had mistaken the assiduities of a man of the world for tokens of affection, had acquired more experience by staying quietly at home than Mortayne by all his travels. *She* perfectly understood that the being to whom she had attached herself under the name of Lord Mortayne was one of her own creation; and though, with the weakness natural to her sex and age, she still loved this ideal personage as one who had been, and was no more, she had suffered too much from the mortifying reproaches of her mother for having hazarded a "flirtation" (as the marchioness called it), the evil issue of which would most likely prevent her settling in life, and, above all, she had felt too deeply the soothing kindness of her brother, Lord Clandon, during the first year of Mortayne's absence, not to have been strenuous in endeavouring to surmount her ill-placed love.

The prudence of her self-government had effected much; and though, on learning his dangerous illness in the East, she had suffered more than himself, and though, when privately apprized by her thoughtful brother of his return to England, a gush of bitter tears had evinced that all was not as yet at rest within, she contrived to meet him in the

ball-room with a degree of self-possession that did honour to the dignity of her character, while it wounded his vanity to the quick.

In personal appearance, so far from presenting the shadowy fadedness he had anticipated, she was greatly improved. Her towering figure had acquired gracefulness and ease; and the serenity of her brow and intelligence of her countenance exempted her, in the opinion of others beside the traveller, from the proverbial plainness of Lady Heriford's daughters. As a matron, Lady Sophia would probably have passed for handsome and charming; but at present a total absence of assumption, and the secluded habits of her life, prevented its being known beyond the limits of her own family that she was one of the most agreeable companions, as well as one of the most amiable beings in the world.

It was difficult, however, for Mortayne to forgive the composure with which, after extending her hand to him, and expressing a *banal* hope that he was well, she turned to resume her conversation with her uncle, Lord Kilsythe, with whom at the moment of his entrance she was conversing.

"No wonder!" thought he, shrugging his shoulders, as he caught a glimpse of himself in the opposite glass. "I dare say she hardly knew me. I am grown so complete a quizz, as to have lost all trace of my former self; I am afraid I must renounce my philosophical intentions of wearing out the clothes I left behind me in England. Unless I get Cooke to make me a new coat, I shall be having people mistake me for the butler, and asking me for a glass of sherry."

Nor were these intentions in his own favour diminished by perceiving how superciliously he was passed in review by a young couple, who stood surveying him from a distance, of whom he recognized in the lady the lovely *protégée* of the marchioness; and though the handsome dark young man on whose arm she was leaning was unknown to him, it was to be inferred, from the envied post he occupied, that he was a person of consideration.

Next to being disregarded by Lady Sophia, the thing most vexatious to his renascent self-love was to have been laughed at by the beauty of the night. To the charms of Eleanor Maitland he was, in fact, more alive than other people. For years, his eye had not rested upon so brilliant

a specimen of English beauty ; and that vivid complexion—those flaxen ringlets—that rounded symmetry of form—those pearly teeth—those parted lips playfully displaying them—acquired new value from contrast with the dingy colouring, black teeth, and languid movements from which he had been recoiling in the East. To him, there was something supernatural—something angelic—in the dazzling fairness of Sir Wolseley's sister.

The charm which is said to be the devil's beauty, youth,—is also that of the *roué* ; and the eyes which, fifteen years before, had been enthralled by the full-blown charms of Lady Susan Spilsby, and, from that day to the present, worldworn in the blaze of ball-rooms and glare of public promenades, experienced a sensation of refreshment when resting upon the rounded contour and unblemished skin of the *débutante*, whose bloom was as that of the rose-leaf.

“Lovely, is she not ?” demanded Lord Henry de Capell, who, a mere schoolboy at the time of his quitting England, had just been presented to him as one of the rising youth of Britain. “And not so bad a match either, as my lady-mother (to whom the Maitlands are related) is never tired of informing me ; for failing to get off her daughters, she seems bent upon marrying her sons. But one can't afford to commit matrimony on so slight a provocation.”

What struck Lord Mortayne most in this flippant apostrophe was, that Lord Henry could not be aware the man he was addressing was supposed to have had some share in the non-marriage of one of his sisters ; and he was rejoiced to find that the report concerning himself and Lady Sophia had either never got wind, or expired with the first whisper. Thus relieved from all scruple, both by the indifference of the family and her own forgetfulness of the past, he accepted that very evening the reiterated invitation of the marchioness, which he was now arriving at Heriford Castle to fulfil.

“And who have you here, my dear Vassall ?” inquired he, on finding that, somewhat *désorienté* by his sojourn in foreign lands, he had made his appearance an hour before the ringing of the dressing-bell, or the return of the scattered party from their morning excursions ; and that the only individual to be met with, besides the servants in attendance, was an individual, who, at his own *début* in life fifteen years be-

fore, had been called "Old Vassall," and was never remembered young by those who were *then* old. No change had occurred in his appearance since they parted; very little, in fact, in Mortayne's recollection. His was a sort of fossil nature, the relic of another age; and though when, in the strictest confidence and with closed doors he was sometimes tempted to exhibit to the men of the day, certain lockets, and above all certain miniatures connected with the brighter passages of his life, a strong resemblance had more than once been discovered between these interesting portraits and the grandmothers of the *confidantes*,—belles who had shone at the court of George III. and withered at that of the Regent. Old Vassall was not the less attired in the last new cravat and Corazza invented by Ludlam, and the latest fancy *paletôt* of Inkson; for the fossil Brummell was a species of block, on which tailors tried their patterns before they were submitted to the boy dandies of Melton or the Guards. To such a man, the fry of fashion was likely to be peculiarly obnoxious.

"Whom have we here, did you say?"—muttered he, reiterating Lord Mortayne's question, for his hearing was not of the acutest. And lo! a prolonged shake of the head, not of the Lord Burghley or deliberative kind, but decidedly reprobatory, purported to supply the answer.

"You must not expect to find Heriford Castle what it used to be!" continued he, on perceiving that Mortayne's interest was awakened. "Since the De Capell boys grew up, they have spoiled the place. What a house this used to be, eh? ten years ago! Do you remember Le Marteau's *bisque d'écrevisses* and *suprême à la financière*? The best first-course cook in Europe, though but a few years before a mere *trousse poulet* at Carlton House! And then, what whist! Half a dozen of the best players in England, winter after winter!"

A deep sigh relieved the oppression of his feelings; and Mortayne, foreseeing that he would work his way in time from the past to the present, wisely forbore to interrupt him.

"And now," continued he, drawing nearer to the fireplace, and extending his well-varnished boots upon the polished fender that scarcely rivalled their brightness—"And now, what a falling off! Next to Kinmaul's, the dinners

here are the worst I know; and as to whist, one is literally shuffled away from the table by a set of boys, who revoke three times a deal!—noisy, prating, self-sufficient apes, who think they do enough for society by appearing every evening in a new set of studs and waistcoat-buttons, and have about as much idea of tying a neckcloth as I of rigging a ship!”

“And who *are* these boys?” inquired Mortayne, not a little amused by the querimonious tones of the old beau. “That son of Lady Heriford’s, whom I saw in town (Henry, I think), seemed a sharpish sort of lad?”

“Yes—*too* sharp by half; like the many-bladed pen-knives, that cut your fingers while you mend a pen. Then there is Newbury, with no more substance in mind or body than in a sheet of silver paper. And that odious fellow, Maitland——”

“Any relation of Lauderdale’s?”

“No; a Sir Wolseley Maitland—a distant relation of the marchioness, whom she would not be sorry to convert into a near one.”

“A *parti*, then?”

“Fifteen thousand a year, *she* says,—and *ten*, I really believe. But a bad style of man, and the last in the world to be taken in as she expects. Though scarcely five-and-twenty, he talks of the world as if his only business in it were to take care of his own comfort. The most undisguised system of egotism you ever beheld! The sort of fellow that rides over you in hunting, and helps himself to the last truffle in the dish. The worst of it is,” continued old Vassall, lowering his voice to a more confidential pitch, “one is obliged to put up with him; for Lady Heriford is so *entichée* with the idea of settling Lady Mary at Wolseley Hall, that the Maitlands make *la pluie et le beau temps* in the house.”

“He is brother, then, to that lovely girl,—that girl with something of a Tollemache face,—whom I saw in London?” said Lord Mortayne. “In that case he has a better advocate in his favour than poor Lady Heriford.”

“Yes, Miss Maitland is what it is the fashion to call a Watteau beauty,—pink and white,—with a mouth *en cœur*, and lace and ribands enough for a Dresden shepherdess! The girl would have been pretty enough, had not her con-

founded fortune of fifty thousand pounds, entitled her to fancy herself beautiful. Thanks to the fuss people make with her, she is growing as affected as the deuce."

"They told me in London she was to marry a handsome young fellow of the name of Barrington, new since my time."

"My dear fellow, you are quite at the bottom of the basket! The handsome young fellow of the name of Barrington, new since your time, is within five-eighths of an inch of proposing to Lady Alicia de Capell."

"To Alicia? *That* would be changing the rose for the nettle, with a vengeance! He is *here*, then?"

"Lady Heriford's right-hand man! Then there is young Wilbraham, the *attaché*, whom they sit down to chess every night with Lady Blanche; fancying that her green complexion will pass for the reflection of the shaded lamp."

"All those you mention appear to have paired off?" said Lord Mortayne, beginning to feel a little nervous lest he should have been invited to the castle with the view of filling the space left vacant by the side of Lady Sophia.

"Oh! there are several, besides you and I, who remain at a loose end!" cried the old beau. "In the first place, there's Newbury,—the greatest man here."

"That raw boy!"

"I should have said, the greatest match! Then there are the Bernardos——"

"That beastly Jew!" exclaimed the new comer, with an air of disgust.

"They have the finest house in Belgrave Square, and give capital dinners. Henry de Capell refused to come down to the castle at all this year, unless the Bernardos were asked; and now Miss Maitland declares that——"

"Hush!" whispered Mortayne, laying an admonitory hand upon his arm, as from the reflection in the glass over the chimney-piece, he saw the door of the room they sat in thrown open, and a long procession of those they were discussing, about to enter the room. "Here comes the fair *débutante*, to explain her own intentions. How are you, my dear Lady Heriford?" And a general burst of delight and gratulation, from young and old, greeted the arrival of Lord Mortayne.

CHAPTER XI.

So on the tip of his subduing tongue,
 All kinds of arguments and question deep,
 All replication prompt, and reason strong,
 For his advantage still did wake and sleep ;
 To make the weeper laugh, the laugher weep,
 He had the dialect and different skill,
 Catching all passions in his craft of will ;
 That he did in the general bosom reign
 Of young and old ; and sexes both, enchanted
 To dwell with him in thoughts, or to remain
 In personal duty, following where he haunted ;
 Consents bewitch'd, ere he desired, have granted ;
 And dialogued for him what he would say.
 Ask'd their own wills, and made their wills obey.

SHAKSPEARE.

ON Eleanor Maitland's arrival in London the preceding season, and renewal of acquaintance with Lady Heriford's daughters, with whom, in earlier life, she had been intimate as a visitor with her father and governess at Heriford Castle, Lady Mary de Capell was the one to open her arms the most cordially to the new comer;—partly from a strong inclination to make a conquest of Sir Wolsley, and partly from the mercurial instincts of her nature.

“ You will get nothing out of Blanche, my dear Eleanor,” said she, as they were walking together one morning in May, in the inclosures near Apsley House. “ Blanche being a little deficient in red and white, has taken upon her to be blue ; and is growing too great a wiseacre to open her eyes to what is passing in the world,—or, at all events, her lips to talk about it.”

“ And Lady Alicia ? ”

“ Alicia has enough to do in taking care of number one ; because, clever enough to know that *her* number one is one that requires to be taken care of. A girl as pretty and as well off as *you*, Nelly, can afford to take her chance ; but Alicia, who has reached six-and-twenty without an opportunity of becoming any thing but De Capell, is forced to improve it. Once married, however, she will become a charming creature. Once married, she will take a place of

her own in society; and, unless the fates are bitterly against her, a famous one it will be! Alicia, mark my words, is a Talleyrand in petticoats!"

"You almost alarm me."

"On what grounds? Her manœuvres are all on her own account. She has no leisure to trouble herself about you, me, or any other such insignificant people."

"There certainly seems more sympathy in the character of your sister Sophia."

"Oh, Sophy is kindness itself! But Sophy was crossed in love, after her first season, and has scarcely been out since."

"I remember hearing from my father that she was going to be married to Lord Mortayne; and afterwards, that he had gone abroad, and forgotten her."

"No 'going to be married' in the case, my dear! The only true part of the story is, that he went abroad, and has never come back."

"And was he so *very* delightful a person?"

"Why surely, even at Wolesley Hall, you must have heard of Lord Mortayne?"

"I have heard him cited as the best-dressed and most agreeable man about town. But *you* must have known him so much more intimately!"

"No, indeed! We were all of us kept strictly in the school-room for the last year or two, previous to coming out; so that I saw but little of poor Sophia's courtship. I remember him much better, as a child; when he used to come every winter to hunt at the castle, and when the character of the prettiest woman of the party was, I suspect, usually the worse for his visits. He was a dreadful *roué*, they say; but as popular with the men as worshipped by the other sex."

"Which is not often the case."

"The men were afraid of him; the women, unluckily, *not!*"

"*Afraid* of him?"

"Never was there anything half so clever as his *mots*. And in those days he spared nobody. When he gave a nickname, it stuck to a person for life; or, if he wished to exclude a man from society, it was done by a word!"

“Were it not for Sophia’s sake, I should say, ‘Thank goodness he left England before our time.’”

“Your time, if you will; but I have always had the greatest curiosity to know him. There are so few influential people about town nowadays,—so few who make one look about one before one answers,—so few who give rather than take,—so few whose sayings are worth remembrance. The young men of the day are either shy, and say nothing, like my brother Clandon,—or talk slang, like Henry,—or trash, like Algernon.”

“There are certainly not many one should like as companions for life.”

“I don’t know. As a companion for life, I would not choose a man *too* clever. I was talking of Lord Mortayne as an acquaintance,—as a man of the world,—as one universally missed in society.”

“We had better talk of him no more,” rejoined the fair *débutante*, with a smile; “it might put us out of conceit with those more within our reach.”

When, however, towards the end of the season, the man thus canvassed and thus lauded was not only pointed out to her notice, but presented to her acquaintance, the interest of Miss Maitland having been inexpressibly excited; she was forced to admit herself disappointed. Lord Mortayne proved far less good-looking, far less striking in appearance than she expected. In a crowd she could have passed him without heed; and unannounced, would have listened to him without interest. Languid and sickly-looking, his clothes hung loosely about him, as usually the case with those returning from the East; and the next time Eleanor Maitland surveyed the grave face of Lady Sophia, whose paleness she had hitherto attributed to attachment for the invisible phoenix, she could not help feeling that her *belle passion* was terribly thrown away.

At Greensells, however, she was taught another lesson. By the time Mortayne had been a month in London, vivifying the stagnation of his vapid *clique* by the sallies of his wit, almost all his former influence was regained. His *bon mots* were beginning to be again cited—his peculiarities again imitated; Jupiter was once more surrounded by his satellites. Those who arrived by the train, in time for

dinner, straight from the spot where the restored altar of the idol was again set up, were sure to bring down with them some capital new anecdote of "Morty," of some fashionable impostor whom he had crushed by a smile, or a tale of Eastern travel, which, graphically related by himself, had been perpetuated by the pencil of some caricaturist of *ton*."

"Yes! the duchess's last breakfast of the season was charming; for Mortayne was there, and in high spirits."

Or, "Will you believe that Twingem spoke vilely at the last debate before the prorogation of parliament, only because aware that Morty was in the gallery expressly to hear him. Twingem is new since Morty's time. But I never should have thought so impudent a fellow could be so thoroughly looked down."

Or, "I trust, dear Lady Heriford, you were not angry with me for not being here yesterday, as I half promised. The fact is, I was asked to meet Mortayne at dinner, and *that* is a thing one cannot command every day."

The King of Clubs had again turned up a trump. All the *prestige* of his former popularity was returning; and Charles Barrington and other minor *protégés* of Lady Heriford, had hardly patience with the tone of exultation in which she announced to all her friends, that "Lord Mortayne had promised to spend a few days with her at Heriford Castle."

"One would think she was talking of the Duke of Wellington!" said he.

"One would little imagine she was talking of a man who had behaved so ill to her daughter!" whispered another of the malcontents.

But the person who thought most about the matter, was one who said nothing—the *débutante*; who, so far from suspecting the favourable impression she had made on the man whose notice conferred fashion and whose reprobation anathema, attributed to personal contempt the little *empressement* evinced by the noble pilgrim after his introduction to cultivate her acquaintance.

Accustomed to refer the impulses of others exclusively to herself, it did not occur to her that he kept aloof because she was so frequently the companion of Lady Sophia; a sense of justice towards whom, rendered him scrupulous

about creating any possible misconception of his feelings or intentions.

Undervaluing, like most young people, the treasures she possessed in the beauty and spotlessness of youth, Miss Maitland accordingly prepared for the conquest she was too ambitious of achieving wholly to despair, with arms far more available to any one of the three hundred and sixty-five superannuated coquettes, with whom, in succession, his name had been already coupled, than to herself.

Thanks to the command of her fortune conceded her by Sir Wolseley, she was at all times more richly and elaborately dressed than became her years. But on the announcement of Lord Mortayne's visit to Heriford Castle, letters were hastily despatched to London to procure a new supply of such finery as the changeful fancy of fashion is ever on the *qui vive* to create, for the benefit of milliners, jewellers, and vanity shops of all descriptions, and the deterioration of womankind; and had Charles Barrington remained blind to the ambitious nature of her character, he had every pretext for believing her intent upon winning back, by a renovation of attraction, the homage that was now openly transferred to the feet of Lady Alicia de Capell.

He knew better, however. He saw that her arrows were aimed at some bright particular star, far above his head; though in what constellation shining (as Lord Mortayne had not yet made his appearance), he was unable to surmise. By degrees, every feature of her character became effaced by the endeavour to please. She was no longer unpunctual, no longer capricious, no longer disdainful. When asked to sing, she sang; when some one was required to play that others might dance, she played. Though assiduous as ever at the backgammon-table of the old marquis, she was not the less ready for duetts with Lady Mary de Capell, or a game at *écarté* with Old Vassall. The once wayward *débutante* appeared to have changed places with "his dear little good cousin Maria."

But when the thought of *her* glanced into his mind, the hollowness of Eleanor's amiability became, in a moment, apparent. By comparison with Miss Brenton, it was clear she was acting a part. But then came the biting reflection that he, too, was an actor; and with a hasty start of com-

punction, he hurried off to perform the systematic ko-too to the Marchioness of Heriford, which purported to create a Lady Alicia Barrington, and secure his footing on the slippery ladder of preferment.

He was in some degree justified in implicit reliance on Lady Heriford's influence. Nature seemed to have destined her for command, so imposing was her towering figure,—so authoritative, when she chose, her queenly brow; and having united herself, in the full prime and tide of beauty, with a man thirty years older than herself, she had ever since maintained over him and his a monarchy unlimited.

No one had much cause to blame her mode of holding the sceptre. When young, her beauty had been unblighted by scandal; and at an epoch when so many noble estates were encumbered by extravagance, and royal example rendered prodigality an act of courtiership, Lady Heriford maintained such excellent order in her household, that, at the death of his father (who was now eighty years of age), Lord Clandon was to succeed to a property wholly unembarrassed.

Nothing had been done, indeed, to improve it. Had the reins of government been held by an intelligent, enterprising man, there were mines and forests which might have been turned to better account; and facilities for building speculation in the neighbourhood of the manufacturing town near which Heriford Castle was situated, which, it was whispered, might have been made to add thousands to the family income. But there was nothing commercial or covetous in the nature of the marchioness,—nothing of the vulgar rage for speculation of the present day. By prudence only, she had contrived that the ten thousand pounds apiece, to be raised progressively on the estates for the benefit of every child born of her marriage, should be secured to them without injury to the heir-apparent.

The moral administration of her family was akin to the financial. She had brought up her children to man and woman's estate, without affecting to render them wiser or better than their forefathers; and though it would have been pleasanter to have reared prize-plants,—to find her daughters handsomer, and her sons more agreeable,—she was less disappointed by their deficiencies than more ambitious

mothers. Provided they married tolerably well, it was the utmost she felt entitled to expect. The advanced age of the marquis, at whose death the female and junior portion of the family must sink into comparative insignificance, rendered their early settlement in life the chief object.

This moderation, so rare in her class of life, was the result of a higher influence. Though fifty years of age, her mother, the Dowager Lady Kilsythe, was still extant;—one of those stern mothers of families of the last century, who, comprehending their mission in its fullest sense, continue to exercise their parental authority with a palsied hand, over heads that are palsied. Though the locks of the Marchioness of Heriford were now “of a sable-silvered,”—though at the head of a princely establishment, and disposing of an income of nearly thirty thousand a year,—the moment the old lady, in her high-heeled shoes and mode bonnet and cloak, hobbled into the house, scrutinizing, questioning, reproving, she subsided into a mere girl. It was the uncompromising dowager who had ventured to tell her that her daughters were plain, and her eldest son a boor; and it was to the same infallible authority she confided her perception of young Barrington’s attentions to Lady Alicia, and sought her guidance and counsel in return.

Pending the answer,—for at seventy-one, old Lady Kilsythe was as cautious in emitting a judgment as a lord chancellor or a committee of taste,—nothing was neglected to render Heriford Castle attractive to its guests. It was a pleasant house to stay in. There were no unnatural efforts at display;—there was no straining after effect. Unharassed by pecuniary cares, the host and hostess were equable and easy in their temper and hospitalities.

The mansion itself, of vast antiquity, served to second their views. The growth of succeeding centuries,—one quadrangle still presenting the battlemented ferocity characteristic of the stronghold of one of the great vassals of the crown, while another, containing the state apartments, was of Elizabethan architecture,—its very irregularity superseded the coldness often produced by the formality of a grander design. The rooms were perfectly comfortable; neither Palladian nor Vitruvian, nor *à la Renaissance*, nor *à la Louis XIV.*, but perfectly comfortable. Where a sofa

was wanted, there was a sofa; where a book-table could be available, there was a book-table: though upholsterers and decorators would probably have torn their hair with anguish at the incorrectness of their placing.

‡ A fine gallery, rich in antiques and pictures, by the first masters, and connecting the two *corps de logis*, was lighted every night, as the medium of communication between the library and billiard-room, and the splendid saloon in which the party staying in the house usually assembled: and this gallery, each of the embayed windows of which was a room in itself, and furnished with seats and *bahuts*, cabinets and vases, was the favourite resort of the younger members of the family. There, they separated into groups, or promenaded in couples;—there, they gossiped over portfolios of H. B.'s or Count D'Orsay's portraits, or engravings after the Heriford collection. There, when dancing was the order of the night, the piano was opened; or if charades were proposed, a couple of Indian screens sufficed in a moment to improvisate a theatre.

The pleasantest room in the castle,—on that point every one was agreed,—was the great gallery! By daylight, the windows overlooked a battlemented glacis (in the *encoignures* of which grew solemn evergreens of great size and age, contrasting their dark masses with the bright-green turf), and commanded an extensive view of the sea. But it was pleasanter still at night, when the brilliant light of four old-fashioned lustres of rock crystal fell upon the rich variety of objects of art, imparting interest to every step of its vast extent. Nothing could be more pleasing than the long perspective of the highly-polished *parquet*; interrupted only where Persian carpets of large dimensions were extended before each of the two old-fashioned fireplaces, the dogs of which were armed knights, three feet in height, cast in solid silver; or by the shadows of groups of graceful girls, with their attendant cavaliers, and Lady Sophia's favourite greyhound, or Lord Henry's wolf-dog, sporting playfully by their side.

Of these groups, Eleanor Maitland was the leading feature. When dancing was proposed, she was the favourite partner; when music, she could sing at sight; when *tableaux*,

her personal beauty made her still more in request. Never was she seen to greater advantage than in the old gallery. For, after coffee, her brother, the only person by whom she was held in constraint, was sure to sit down to whist in the saloon, with the marchioness, Bernardo, and old Vassall; and then came in the sweet of the night for Eleanor.

Night after night, she contrived that some diversion should be selected by her young friends; such as afforded a pretext for summoning from the furthest embrasure of the gallery, which was their favourite haunt, the man who had once been her slave, and the woman who had succeeded her in his worship. For she had not greatness of mind to pardon the desertion she had provoked. She could not forgive having been eclipsed by one so devoid of personal charms as Lady Alicia.

“No, no! indeed we cannot get on without your eldest sister. I will take no part in the charade unless *she* does!” she would exclaim to Henry de Capell, after having herself proposed the performance.

“Lady Alicia de Capell and Mr. Charles Barrington, come into the court. We want you to play benighted travellers (*very* benighted travellers!) for the word *bois*,” was accordingly the summons of the stage-manager; and those whose courtship it was her delight to interrupt had, of course, no plea of exemption from the sports of the party.

When Lord Clandon, urged by brotherly affection for Lady Sophia, had found courage to renounce his sojourn at Greensells and hurry to the North, that he might be on the spot to support his sister by his presence in case of a renewal of Lord Mortayne’s attentions, he was, if not surprised, perhaps a little amused at finding the cousin Charles, concerning whose passion for Eleanor Maitland the guileless Maria was so anxious, in a state of almost open warfare with her, and undisguisedly attached to the train of his sister. But though justified in the assurances he had given to Miss Brenton that the ambitions of the *débutante* were of too lofty a nature to admit of her caring to maintain undue influence over the son of a squire, he cared little to what aim or purpose her scheming was now addressed. She had ceased to be an object of interest to

him now that she could no longer be an object of jealousy to Maria.

That she *had* some specific end in view, was pretty apparent. Game, invisible to himself, was in sight; for the hawk was already unhooded.

CHAPTER XII.

A. Is she not most beautiful?
 Most happy, too,—for youth and health and ease
 Are hers; and suppliant fortune waits to ask
 Where lies her choice. Can you foresee what earth
 Has more to yield?

B. Mine eyes are dim to-day,
 The rose grows on her cheek. Has it no thorn?—PROCTOR.

THE even tenor of life so long established at Easton Hoo was not easily resumed after an event so remarkable as the inbreak of the great people from Greensells. The Herifords might take their departure for the North, and pursue *their* customary habits; but all was changed with those they left behind.

As soon as the newspapers announced the marquis's family to be settled at the Castle till the ensuing spring, so that there was no chance of their return to require conciliation, the wrath of the lesser of their Buckinghamshire neighbours exploded. Such as had been totally overlooked put no limits to their scandal. Such doings as were reported to have taken place at Greensells—such *un*-doings; fathers of families ruined by five-guinea whist, and daughters by moonlight excursions on the lake, in which reputations ran as narrow a chance of going to the bottom as their fair owners. The vulgar spoke coarsely—the clever bitterly; most of them falsely, and *all* with malice *prepense*; and though people like the Chalkneys of Pountney Hill, who felt as much wounded by the distant civility of the De Capells as others by their utter neglect, fancied they gained in consequence by defending the great folks among the small (“*they* had not the same reason to pick holes in the coat of

the Marquis of Heriford as Mr. Harman of Hedgington, and others belonging to the same class of the community"), they repaid themselves by fierce attacks on the family in presence of the Barringtons.

Toadyism is an evil growth of the aristocratic tendency of our national institutions, as the miseltoe of the oak, was putting forth a thousand unsightly sprouts. People who had been living in peace by their comfortable firesides for the last half dozen years had been made wretched by the three weeks' sojourn of a noble family in the country!

But it was not the snappings and snarlings they had incurred by the notice of Lord and Lady Heriford that engendered as much discomfort under the dilapidated roof of Easton Hoo, as under the slated one of Squire Harman, of Hedgington, or the well-welted leads of Pountney Hill. It was not even the wormwood face with which Sir Hildebrand sneered his inquiries, the first time he visited his offending neighbours, concerning the spasmodic attentions of Lord Clandon, "who had disappeared from Greensells," he observed, "as suddenly as a shooting star."

The abrupt departure of the earl was, nevertheless, a matter of personal regret. Not, perhaps, to Mr. Barrington; for in spite of the cargoes of venison, game, and pineapples, that found their way across the country from Greensells, he could not but connect with his lordship's perpetual visits,

That climax of all earthly ills,
The inflammation of his weekly bills;

and though charmed with the consequence assigned him among the clodhoppers by being seen in such close alliance with the future representative of the county—a marquis apparent—he had calculated to a shilling the exact cost of the distinction.

But his wife was as much startled as grieved by the disappointment of hopes which she had fancied progressing auspiciously towards fulfilment; nor could she reconcile Lord Clandon's precipitate journey with her previous conviction of his consistency and good sense. Maria, however, was the person most disturbed by his loss. Not alone because, in spite of his ploughboy deportment, his conversation was a great resource. But because he was never weary of

answering her questions ; and because his answers afforded her only means of surmising the nature of her cousin's present occupations and projects.

What was she to do, now he was gone ? What was to replace the excitement of expecting the almost daily visit, that brought news of Heriford Castle ? No likelihood that Charles's recent letter would be repeated for weeks to come. Like most unsympathizing people, he was a bad correspondent. *He* could not conceive why anybody ever wanted to hear from anybody.

She almost wished she had courage to sit down and write to Lord Clandon himself for news of her cousin ! Lord Clandon was so thoroughly kind. Lord Clandon never seemed surprised at anything she said or did. Lord Clandon, if she asked it of him, would never, she was sure, betray to living mortal that she had so addressed him. But then came the timely reflection that the impropriety of the act was evident, in the necessity of conditioning for secrecy.

Poor Maria was becoming almost idle,—almost a saunterer ; partly in consequence of the break-up of her regular habits of life by the constant presence of their noble guest, but still more from the tendency to reverie occasioned by anxiety for the sake of the absent one we love. Instead of proceeding straight to the village of Easton every day, on her errands of charity, she went the longest way about,—through the shrubberies, where the birds were now piping up their autumnal song, and the barberries, and mountain-ash berries as red as coral. For that old bench, niched into the winding of the walk, where she had sat and talked with Charles the day after Miss Maitland's visit to the Hoo, was a sad, *sad* temptation !

She made, however, some effort to cast aside these listless habits,—set herself a double task of needlework,—and discovered that the tent-stitch chair-cushions in Charles's room were so faded as to require replacing. She even resolutely abstained from inquiring every morning from the servant, whether the post had brought letters. She knew she had no right to make that well-known handwriting the chief object of her day.

It was, consequently, a great surprise one morning, on

entering the breakfast-room, where she was usually the first of the party, to find her uncle and aunt not only beforehand with her, but engaged, on her entrance, in earnest conversation, near the self-same window on which Mr. Barrington was drumming, while he surveyed his harvest fields, when first introduced to the reader.

His wife, indeed, held an open letter in her hand; and neither of them being aware that Maria was within hearing, they pursued their remarks on the contents. Convinced that it was from Heriford Castle,—from Charles,—she saw no reason to warn them of her presence.

“The most preposterous scheme I ever heard of!” was her uncle’s indignant ejaculation. “Though long aware of his total indifference towards my comfort and happiness, I was not prepared for *this!*”

Poor Maria, even if disposed to apprise them that she was at hand, now wanted breath for the announcement. What could her cousin have been about! In the greatness of her emotion, she sank trembling into a chair.

“I see plainly,” continued her uncle, “that he feels he has not long to live. Every line of the letter proves him to be near his end.”

A groan that escaped the blanched lips of Miss Brenton suspended these unfeeling communications.

“Here she *is!*” said he, coolly addressing his wife. “I did not hear her come in. Not a word on the subject, now!”

“Are you ill, my dear Maria?” said Mrs. Barrington, disregarding him and hastening to her niece. “You seem faint, my dear. What is the matter? Have you been long in the room?” But Miss Brenton could not utter a word. “Open the window!” cried Mrs. Barrington to her husband, apprehensive that she was about to faint. “It must be the closeness of the room,—it must be the vapour of the urn.”

“No, dear aunt!” gasped the poor girl, clinging with both hands to the arm with which Mrs. Barrington was endeavouring to support her. “It is nothing!—I shall be better in a moment. From what you were saying when I entered the room, I—I fancied—I feared,—that my cousin’s life was in danger.”

“In danger? Poor thing! She died last April, and her infant with her!” was Mr. Barrington’s unaccountable reply. But what the deuce can it signify to *you*, Maria, who never had the smallest communication with her in your life?”

“What *does* he mean?” was so plainly depicted in Miss Breton’s pale and wondering face, that Mrs. Barrington hastened to set her mind at ease.

“Your uncle alludes, my dear, to the married daughter of his brother Humphrey.”

“The letter, then, is not from Heriford Castle?”

“No! From Madras.”

And Maria, if before ashamed of her indisposition, felt at once so relieved and overpowered, that it was fortunate her uncle’s attention was directed from her by the entrance of the servants and the toast-rack.

“How many times must I tell you, sir,” said he, addressing the frightened footman, “to toast only three slices! You seem to take pleasure in wasting the bread. *I* never eat dry toast. *Bread* is good enough for *me*; and how are your mistress and Miss Brenton, pray, to get through more than three slices? If I see you fill the toast-rack in that ridiculous way again, I will discharge you on the spot.”

And while he continued muttering, and citing instances of the wanton waste in his household, as earnestly as though the letter he had received, and which still lay beside his plate, did not regard the most intimate interests of his heart, Maria had time to recover herself.

She did not venture to revert to the subject, but busied herself in preparing her uncle’s tea. Though Mr. Humphrey Barrington was as nearly related to her as to Charles, and though her mother had been his favourite sister, she never felt entitled to feel interested in a connection who had never troubled himself on her account. He had, however, been too good a friend to her cousin for her not secretly to lament the loss of his daughter; and to hope, while she dropped the pieces of sugar into the cream-pot, that it had not made him *too* unhappy.

“It will, perhaps, make him return to England the sooner!” murmured she, thinking aloud, but thinking about the matter at all only because aware of Charles’s

anxieties concerning the impending withdrawal of his allowance.

Mr. Barrington glanced at her, and at the letter beside him, as if for a moment in doubt about making her acquainted with the contents. But it was a question that required serious deliberation; and for once he decided that it would be the better deliberated upon with the assistance of his wife.

After breakfast, therefore, while the footman, half-frightened and half-sullen, was clearing the table, his master invited Mrs. Barrington into the little littered dungeon, which he called his study; where, so alarmed was he lest the servants should disarrange, or perhaps purloin, his paltry belongings, that the dust was suffered to accumulate till every article it contained became valueless. The papers could no longer be read with safety,—the stationery no longer be used; the collection of miscellaneous rubbish on the chimney-piece and book-shelves,—old nails, rusty screws, broken corkscrews, an old horse-shoe, pen-knives without blades, chisels without handles, balls of twine, ends of sealing-wax, packets of garden-seeds, a Brobdignag poppy-head, a cone of Indian corn, a fox's brush (the property of Charles, but somewhat moth-eaten), a goose's wing, and a phial of sweet-oil,—besides an innumerable number of unsightly objects picked up in the course of his walks,—would have put a miser's treasury to shame.

"Sit down a minute," said he, with unusual courtesy, dusting with his cotton handkerchief the dirty rush-bottomed chair that threatened destruction to her gown; and turning back the window-shutters (usually kept half-closed, lest the sun should penetrate into the treasure-vault), in order to obtain light for the reperusal of the letter. "We must talk over this matter seriously; for the overland mails are closed on Saturday next, and my brother will doubtless expect an answer to his extravagant proposal!"

"Of course he will!"

"And what do you think had best be done?"

"In what way?"

"As regards taking Charles into our councils?"

"It would not be fair, I think, to leave him in ignorance of his uncle's proposals," replied Mrs. Barrington gravely;

“but I can venture to forestal his answer, that acceptance is out of the question.”

“You must be pretty deep in his secrets to speak so decidedly!” was her husband’s angry rejoinder.

“The fears you have always entertained of an attachment between him and Maria,” replied Mrs. Barrington, “rendered it necessary to have my eyes about me; anxious that you should not be thwarted on the subject, I have had occasion to perceive that my son is decidedly averse to his cousin.”

“That is, you mean, that you have tried to set him against her?”

“If I had, I should have fancied myself only fulfilling your wishes. But there was no occasion to interfere. His own inclinations pointed in another direction.”

“Curse his inclinations!” was Mr. Barrington’s coarse and angry reply. “Charles’s patrimony is not exactly of the kind that enables a young fellow to indulge in inclinations! And if I thought this project of Humphrey’s for a marriage between him and Maria foreboded better things than the miserable thousand a year he proposes to allow them to facilitate the match, I should plainly give Mr. Charles Barrington to understand that he had best put his inclinations into his pockets! But I can’t quite see through my brother’s drift.”

“Surely he writes very plainly on the subject? Apprized, doubtless by yourself, that in consequence of the narrowness of your income, your niece is to reside for the future with her father’s relations, the Cornburys, Humphrey hastens to say, that he thinks it cruel to remove her from the spot where she was brought up;—and that if any mutual inclination should subsist between his nephew and niece, he will be happy to secure a home to his sister’s orphan, by allowing them conjointly six hundred a year, in addition to the four already enjoyed by Charles;—an income, he says, on which if a young couple cannot manage to live and be happy, they ‘are not worth their salt!’”

“I certainly mentioned in my last letter to India, that I could not afford to keep her,” mused Mr. Barrington.

“In that case, the plan was very kindly imagined.”

"I can't understand my brother!" was her husband's pceivish rejoinder. "The comfort and welfare of every member of the family he seems to consider before mine! However, I shall prove to him that I am master in my own house," continued he, trying to work himself into a passion, "by informing him that I consider marriage, at Charles's years, on such an income as he proposes, an act of absolute madness."

"That you refuse, in short, *his* proposal?"

"That I refuse."

"Still, as Charles is of age," pleaded his wife, "it would be, surely, only fair to give him a choice in the business? At all events, let him know the extent of his obligations to to his uncle."

"And Maria too, perhaps?" cried Mr. Barrington, with a face inflamed by anger.

"And Maria too. Towards *her*, your brother's intentions are munificent, as compared with her small fortune."

"You probably also think that I ought to exert my eloquence to persuade them into the match?"

"No; for I am persuaded it would be unavailing!"

"Or exercise my paternal authority?"

Mrs. Barrington did not permit herself to add, that compulsion would be equally useless. She simply entreated her husband to enclose the letter for her son's perusal, laying before him his parents' view of the matter, namely, that the offer of Mr. Humphrey Barrington must be declined, but declined with deference and conciliation.

To this, her husband gave a reluctant consent. But on consulting the mail-lists, he discovered that, to be in time for the overland mail, his letters to Madras must be made up that very morning.

"My brother seems ill and hypped," said he. "He is doubtless overset by the untimely end of his daughter. Humphrey will be altering his will, or some damned thing of that kind; and should his testamentary dispositions be made with reference to a marriage that is not to take place, Charles might lose the benefit of his good intentions. I will write, therefore, in a proper strain of gratitude, and all that sort of thing; informing him that the young people

don't care a hang for each other, and that it would be throwing away his money to promote a match unlikely to conduce to their happiness."

Aware that neither persuasion nor argument would induce him to alter his determination, Mrs. Barrington withdrew, to allow time for the concoction of his despatch. But, true to the dictates of her conscience, she determined that Maria should be aware of having so kind a friend in her absent uncle. It would suffice to tell her what had been his plans in her favour. She was too well aware of the nature of her cousin's predilections, to render it necessary to account for the failure of the project.

The whole morning Mrs. Barrington tried to find occasion for introducing the subject. But it was more difficult than she fancied. To allude, even remotely, to an event so likely to have secured her own happiness as a mother, produced an unspeakable pang in her heart. At length, when, in the afternoon, the master of the house protruded his head into the sitting-room arrayed in the least shabby of his straw hats (an unfailing signal that he was about to ride the shooting pony to Tring, to the seedsman's, or ironmonger's, or post-office, or some other equally interesting errand), his wife, perceiving that he held in his hand the important letter which it had cost him the whole morning to bring into shape, determined, the moment he was gone, to broach the critical subject.

Already they had discussed the untimely decease of the poor young woman who was gone with her infant to the grave, within a year of her marriage; and already Maria's compassionate heart had suggested that, luckily, her uncle had still a daughter to console him.

"He appears to be a very kind-hearted man," said she. "How few instances one hears of parents in India preferring, as *he* did, that their children should receive a moderately good education, to the separation which was to render them more accomplished!"

"It is for the strengthening of their health, rather than the perfecting of their education, European children are sent home from India," observed Mrs. Barrington; "and your cousins, you see, have turned out delicate in consequence. Humphrey *is*, however, a kindly affectioned

creature; and I cannot give you a greater proof of it, my dear Maria, than in the fact that had an attachment arisen between yourself and your cousin Charles, he was willing to afford you the means of being happy together."

Though Mrs. Barrington had seen her niece that morning so thoroughly overpowered by the mere surmise of her cousin's indisposition, she was not, strange to say, prepared for the overwhelming emotions that overcame Maria Brenton, when, by degrees, the whole measure of her uncle's intended generosities was disclosed. Pale and motionless as a statue, her work having fallen upon her knees, and with big tears slowly stealing from her eyes, she sat, trying to listen,—trying to understand,—trying to prevent her heart from breaking.

That such a destiny should have been in store for her,—that a beneficent relative, at the instigation of a still more bountiful providence, should have so provided for her happiness,—was indeed a vision of bliss; and that she should have proved unworthy of it,—yes, unworthy of it, for had she been prepossessing as other girls, her cousin could not have been insensible to her attachment,—was a thing, she thought, to humble her to the dust!

When, by degrees, she recovered free use of her faculties, her first impulse was to take her aunt's hand and raise it to her lips.

"What friends I have had!" faltered she, in a very low voice. "What kind considerate friends! Parents could not have been more thoughtful! Had I been worthy of becoming Charles's wife, how—but do not let us talk of it," said she. "Do not let me be ungrateful for the many blessings still within my reach."

"We will touch upon the subject no more then, dearest Maria," rejoined her aunt, with a gush of tears that acknowledged anything rather than want of merit in the self-accusing girl. "But you must write to your uncle Humphrey. He has claims upon your acknowledgments. Write directly, dearest; write now that your heart is full. It is not necessary that Mr. Barrington should be apprised of your letter; but it must go by to-day's post, or miss the mail."

From habitual submission, Maria would instantly have

obeyed. But on this occasion she complied at the instigation of her overcharged feelings. She *wanted* to thank this kind brother of her mother (that her mother should have had *one* brother so kind, and one such as him under whose roof she was abiding); and, having hastened up to her little attic to relieve her heart by transcribing all that it contained,—all her gratitude,—all her love,—all her certainty that her mother, who was in Heaven, would intercede for blessings on the protector of her poor child,—her poor harassed aunt occupied the interim in seeking among the Easton villagers a trusty messenger who would convey the letter to Tring, in time for the post, without calling forth the animadversions of her husband.

When found, and the errand bargained for and requited, Mrs. Barrington took the letter from the trembling hand of her niece, to deliver it to the care of the messenger: how little surmising the influence that almost accidental occurrence was to exercise over *her* destinies and those of her son!

CHAPTER XIII.

'Tis the heart's home, to have a world in Time,
 Of happy thoughts that we have known before;
 Hearing in common words the holy chime
 Of those sweet Sabbath bells—the dreams of yore.

BULWER LYTTON.

MARIA BRENTON awoke next morning with the sensations of a person who has undergone a violent blow; for the heart may be stunned and bruised as well as the outward frame, and hers felt sore, even to anguish. She did not, however, the less exert herself to arise with a patient mind and cheerful face; and was, as usual, the first in the breakfast-room. On her uncle's appearance, according to family custom, the tea was poured out. But the surprise expressed by Mr. Barrington on finding that his wife was not established at table with her niece, darkened to dire displeasure as breakfast proceeded, and the rack, with the memorable three slices

of dry toast, made its appearance,—and no Mrs. Barrington.

“I should not be surprised if she were going to treat us with a touch of Lady Heriford, and breakfast in her own room,” said he, with a grim smile, purporting to express his opinion that such an excess of self-assumption was out of the question.

“I am almost afraid my aunt must be ill,” said Maria, rising from table. “I had better go and tell her that breakfast is ready.”

In a moment she was at the dressing-room door. Her gentle tap was answered by Mrs. Barrington’s as gentle “Come in,”—but in a still lower voice than usual.

Maria’s heart failed her as she entered. For though her aunt was completely dressed, she was seated on a little shabby cane sofa that formed one of the chief articles of furniture in the room, as if incapable of motion; and her niece discovered, on entering, a powerful smell of ether.

“You have been ill, and did not send for me!” cried she, placing herself at Mrs. Barrington’s side, and taking hold of her hand.

“Not ill, dearest.”

“Unhappy, then! Something has vexed you!—Dear aunt, what is the matter?—*What* can I do?”

“Nothing, my dear child, nothing!—I am not ill—I am not unhappy. Only agitated, Maria—only——”

The expression of sympathizing fondness that pervaded the countenance of her niece as she looked anxiously into her face, so overcame the feelings of Mrs. Barrington, that, suddenly throwing her arms about Maria’s neck, she sobbed aloud. For a moment, the heart to which her own was pressed, throbbed in silence. At length, a half-unconscious murmur escaped the lips of Miss Brenton, of “Surely it cannot be for *me* she is fretting?—Surely it is not yesterday’s letter that has overcome her thus?”

“No, dear Maria,” rejoined Mrs. Barrington, feeling it necessary to take courage. “It is not *that*! The letter that has agitated me is from Heriford Castle. It is on Charles’s account I am worried.”

“What has happened?—Some accident?—Some——”

“No accident—nothing unpleasant,” replied her aunt; in

reply rather to the grasping hand fixed upon her arm than to her simple interrogation. "But I have a great deal to talk over with your uncle, and want strength for the effort. It will be best to prepare him. I dread the first outbreak of his violence."

"Charles has been doing wrong, then!—Something is sorely amiss!"

"No, my dear child, no—nothing is amiss. I cannot talk to you about it, Maria, just now. But here is your cousin's letter—take it down to his father. Tell him I hope to see him immediately after breakfast; and that I am going to lie down and compose myself in the interim." Maria silently kissed her forehead; placed a pillow from the adjoining bedroom on the hard cane sofa,—drew down the blinds,—then, having accepted, with a trembling hand, the letter held out to her by Mrs. Barrington, disappeared.

If, in the course of her transit from the dressing-room to the breakfast-room, that well-known handwriting, which had never addressed a letter to herself save for some selfish and peremptory commission, was furtively raised to her lips, she recovered her self-possession in time to say with perfect composure to her uncle, "My aunt is not very well, sir, and is lying down, but hopes to see you after breakfast. I have brought you a letter from my cousin."

Mr. Barrington fixed his eyes scowlingly on her face, as he took it; hoping, perhaps, to ascertain whether the contents had been communicated to the poor relation, sooner than to himself. But he could make out nothing; and, in order to mark his sense of superiority to both the bearer, writer, and sender of the letter, he placed it on the tablecloth beside him, while he proceeded to despatch his second cup of tea, with the sonorous suction of an ox drinking at a pool.

Maria watched him in agonized silence; hoping to derive some insight, from his mode of reading the letter, into the nature of her aunt's discomfiture. For he was accustomed to regard *her* presence no more than that of any other piece of furniture in the room; and when, at length, he took it from the envelope, and ran his eye over the contents, she was, indeed, not long in suspense.

"Confound his impudence!" were the first half-grumbled

words that escaped his lips, on reaching the bottom of the first page; "and the pretence, too, of asking my consent!" He might almost have *felt* how searchingly the eyes of Maria were fixed upon his face,—so eager was she not to lose a syllable that followed.

"Such, then," said he, having apparently mastered the contents of the letter,—“such was the motive of their coming galloping over here from Greensells, wanting luncheon, giving trouble, and putting every one to rout and confusion! Are *you* aware, pray, of the contents of this precious epistle?” continued he, suddenly addressing his niece.

"Only, sir, as far as I have gathered them from your own lips," stammered Maria. "My cousin is going to be married."

"*Going* to be married! That, at least, will be as his father chooses," rejoined the enraged man. "WANTS to be married, you should say; and Want, I suspect, will be his master!"

"I understood that Miss Maitland had a very large fortune?" said Maria, faintly.

"Yes—no—I know nothing about Miss Maitland!—What has Miss Maitland to do with the matter?"

"I fancied I heard you say that my cousin Charles was go—that is, *wanted* to marry her?"

"I said nothing of the kind. If I were only to say the sun shone, you would manage to make some blunder or some mischief out of it!" Maria sighed *very* heavily, but not because thus accused. She was upon thorns. She knew the difficulty of extracting information from her uncle.

"Your cousin, without my consent or sanction, has gone and proposed to Lady Alicia de Capell!"—said Mr. Barington, almost fiercely.

"To Lady Alicia?—To that proud, cold girl?—and she has refused him?"

"Not she; the young lady is willing enough,—*too* willing!—the young lady appears to have jumped at the offer:

And the fruit that will fall without shaking,
By Jove, is too mellow for *me*!"

continued he, with a cruel sneer. "In the little I saw

of the family while they were in this county, I can swear that Charles did not pay her the smallest attention. He was always after that pink and white Miss whom Lady Heriford wants to catch for a son of her own."

"Perhaps it may be on that account they wish to get my cousin out of the way, by engaging him to Lady Alicia?" said Maria, vainly endeavouring to disentangle the confusion of her ideas. "But are you quite sure, uncle, that it is to *her* he has proposed?"

"I am not out of my senses, Maria, though you seem to be a little so yourself. But here is the letter. You may read it, if you choose, while I go up and talk the matter over with your aunt." Miss Brenton received the offer thankfully. It was a proof of confidence she had not expected. Yet, after he had left the room, some minutes elapsed before she was able to decipher a syllable.

At length the worst—(at present, she could call it nothing but *the worst*)—was before her. Yes; her uncle was substantially correct. Charles Barrington was the accepted lover of Lady Alicia.

In preferring his suit for her hand to the marquis, her father, he had stated his fortune to be very inferior to her pretensions; consisting of landed property to the amount of about fifteen hundred a-year, the reversion of which was secured to him by a settlement, at the death of his parents, and an allowance, in the interim, of four hundred per annum from a rich uncle, having no son of his own.

At this point of her cousin's letter, the tears in Maria's eyes rendered it difficult to proceed. But she contrived to make herself understand that, in the event of Mr. Barrington choosing to add four hundred per annum to his son's allowance, the Marquis of Heriford would give to his daughter, in addition to her marriage portion of ten thousand pounds, an allowance of five hundred a-year, till he was able to procure from Government for his son-in-law an appointment to the same amount.

"What a great match for him! How rich and how happy they will be!" exclaimed Maria, to whom the ambitions of her cousin were no secret. Nor did she foresee a single obstacle to the marriage. It did not occur to her as *possible* that a father could grudge an allowance of little more than

the third of his income to an only son,—a son who had hitherto cost him nothing,—a son so gifted to do him honour.

The conference between Mr. Barrington and his wife was, however, of such long continuance, that she began to get uneasy. At length her uncle's heavy step was heard descending the staircase; and, from the lowering expression of his brow, and a crimson streak upon his cheeks, she perceived, as he entered the sitting-room, where she was endeavouring to work, that an altercation had taken place. But she also saw that, as usual, he had the best of it. There was an expression at the corners of his compressed mouth which foreboded to her experienced eye that he had gained his point. Such being the case, his gentle wife must be in need of comforting; and right glad was she to find that, with the narrowness of one over whom penurious habits had gained the ascendancy of second nature, her uncle was hurrying out as usual to "see after his men," regardless of the important interests at that moment agitating the family conclave.

The moment he disappeared into the farm-yard, Maria stole up stairs on tip-toe, and knocked gently at the dressing-room door.

"Me,—only *me*, dear aunt!" said she, on finding it locked; and though it was instantly opened at her appeal, on seeing the red eyes of Mrs. Barrington, Maria almost feared that her aunt might wish to be *quite* alone.

"No, my dear child, come in!" said she, in reply to her niece's proposal not to disturb her. "After all, I must not allow myself to regard this affair as a misfortune. Charles evidently considers himself an object of congratulation. He has obtained the affections and hand of a woman superior to himself in fortune and condition. A fine career is opened before him. It is not for parents to dictate the choice of their children. And though my taste and Charles's never could have agreed, and Lady Alicia de Capell is a person I can scarcely understand his falling in love with, still—"

"Oh no! I am certain he is not in love with her!" interrupted Maria in a low voice; "and that is what makes his conduct so unaccountable."

"Still, I was going to add, it is a prudent marriage for

him to make. The influence of a woman of talent and spirit will compel him to exert those natural abilities which I was beginning to fear were fated to run to waste." Maria was always careful not to interrogate her aunt further than she might like to be questioned. It was difficult, therefore, to refrain from wondering what could have produced her tears, since already she was able to discern merit in the match.

She had not long to wait for an explanation. Mrs. Barrington appeared to feel that, by the marriage of her son, she was to gain a daughter as well as a daughter-in-law. No need *now* to assign prudent limits to her demonstrations of affection towards that orphan girl! She might love her as much as she pleased: she might even show how much she loved her. Mr. Barrington would have no pretext *now* for sending her to the Cornburys. The danger to her cousin was at an end!—

"Unluckily, however well I may reconcile myself to my son's choice," she consequently began, "there are preliminaries to be adjusted, which have produced, and will continue to produce, the most vexatious family discussions."

"I was afraid my uncle was displeased."

"He will not hear of alienating so large a portion of his income. Yet it is little more than Charles would have cost him, had his brother been less liberal."

"And without the allowance demanded," inquired Miss Brenton, "the marriage could not take place?"

"Lord Heriford would certainly have a right to oppose it, considering the liberality of his own conduct."

"But has my uncle *absolutely* refused?"

"Almost worse. He insists on my proposing a measure to Charles so every way repugnant to my feelings—"

"But since it is not of your suggestion, and my cousin is so well aware of your want of power to control the measures of the family—"

"Even *that* is no excuse for my conniving in an act of duplicity."

"Of *duplicity*?"

"Obtain Charles's acquiescence, I trust I shall *not*!" resumed Mrs. Barrington; "but it is an act of justice towards my son to let him know the exact intentions of his

father. In short," continued she, with shortened breath and her pale face tinged with a rising blush of shame—"Mr. Barrington proposes to meet the conditions of the Heriford family by *apparent* compliance; and that the four hundred a-year shall be privately repaid him by his son!"

"How shabby!" burst spontaneously from the lips of Maria. "But Charles will not think of such a thing. Charles *could* not accede to such a thing." Mrs. Barrington remained silent. She felt, to her sorrow, that nothing was more likely.

"Lord and Lady Heriford have demanded the extension of the allowance," added her niece, "evidently because they consider a certain income indispensable to their daughter's rank in life and personal comfort. To give her less than the advantages promised, would be defrauding them."

"Such is the point of view in which I have placed the matter before Mr. Barrington, and shall place it before my son; insisting also, that Lady Alicia shall be fully apprized of the uncertain tenure of his uncle's allowance. From the letter we received yesterday from Madras, I have every reason to believe it will be continued. But it is impossible to count upon the caprices of a man so eccentric as Humphrey Barrington."

"And will Charles, do you think, dear aunt, make proof of the same frankness as yourself?" A heavy sigh and a mournful wave of the head were her only reply.

"He has lived so much in the world," said Maria, as if pleading in extenuation of the deceit they mutually foresaw; "he has lived among such hollow, worthless people, that it is not surprising his standard of morality should be lower than—than is desirable."

"I fear, my dear Maria," was the grave rejoinder of her aunt, "that the root of the evil lies nearer home than his recent companionships. For some time past, for years indeed, my conscience has taxed me heavily concerning the rearing of my son. It is disclosing no family secret to *you*, to admit that my life has not been a happy one. That only child, Maria, was, in former days, my solitary comfort. I lived *for* him, and *in* him, or I must have died outright. He was beautiful, *you* will readily believe how beautiful; and sufficiently frail of health to render the tenure of my hap-

piness a slight one. All I thought of, therefore, was to make him happy—happy, as *I* was fated never more to be. With that foolish pretension ever uppermost in my thoughts, (for what right have poor sinful human beings, in their state of probation, to *pretend* to happiness?) I neglected other considerations. All I wished was to screen his childish faults from his father's anger. I never considered the growth those childish faults might attain. But the lesson of concealment was a bad one to sanction. Better had I allowed him to be occasionally unjustly punished, than connive at a single sacrifice of truth."

"My uncle's nature is so reserved," said Maria, in a low voice, "that my cousin may have been naturally less open than many others."

"Still, the fault was with his mother. No child is *born* a liar. No, dear Maria, I do not and do not *want* to deceive myself. All Charles's selfishness, all his worldliness, is ascribable to my fatal indulgence. I discovered my error when it was too late to amend it; and could only try to modify the result."

"The mother of an only son may surely be pardoned *some* weakness in his favour,——" Maria was beginning.

"And the more so, when, as in *my* case, the reward i thanklessness. Charles has never loved me as he ought. But——"

She paused. The instinct, acquired by all who live in fear of a despot, apprized her, at that instant, that her husband had re-entered the house. She had only found time to dismiss Maria with the view of addressing her son, according to his orders, when Mr. Barrington knocked at the door to know whether her letter was ready for the post.

CHAPTER XIV

O meikle thinkes my luve o' my beauty,
 And meikle thinkes my luve o' my kin ;
 But little thinkes my luve I ken brawly
 My tocher's the jewel has charms for him.
 It's a' for the apple he'll nourish the tree,
 It's a' for the hiney he'll cherish the bee ;
 My laddie's sae mickle in luve wi' the siller
 He canna' hae luve to spare for me.—BURNS.

THE event which was exciting so great a sensation at Easton Hoo had taken a little by surprise even the persons on whose will it might be supposed to depend.

On the sudden arrival of Lord Clandon at Heriford Castle, it was generally noticed that his abrupt manner had become considerably softened. He was not like himself. The influence of the charming society in which he had been living, and where he was secure from the perpetual play of *persiflage* of which he was the victim in his own family, and which, by converting him into a butt, almost rendered him a savage, had rendered him a sociable being. He had discovered that he could be listened to, without *ennui*, by those whose attention was worth having.

Anxiety on behalf of his sister Sophia completed the mollification of his nature. Aware of the ordeal imposed upon her in thus meeting with Lord Mortayne in all the familiarity of private life, he felt for her so tenderly and so truly, that his heavy countenance seemed endued with new-found sensibility. He was in no mood to be ungracious, even to those whom he disliked or mistrusted ; and on a chance encounter with Miss Maitland, in Charles Barrington's presence, a few hours after his arrival at the castle, the recollection of all the inquiries addressed to him on her account by Maria, brought such interesting associations to his mind, that others besides the former admirer of the *débutante* might have been tempted to ascribe his flushing cheeks and unconcealable emotion to the tenderest origin.

“The poor dupe is come to offer her his hand!” was Charles's immediate conclusion. “He remained behind at

Greensells doubtless in the hope of conquering a passion which he saw was not returned. But his efforts having proved ineffectual—though aware that he will be accepted only as a match—as the fountain-head of precedence, family diamonds, and a princely establishment—he prefers making her his, even at the cost of his self-esteem! After all, then, she will be a marchioness! Her utmost wishes will be accomplished! Her worldly heart will be triumphant! She will have thrown me over to some purpose. I shall have been her stepping-stone, and the stepping-stone by which her coronet was reached. Her flirtation with me was made the pretext for accompanying the Herifords into Buckinghamshire, only to secure opportunities for casting her nets around Clandon—Clandon, that unlicked cub, at whom we have so often laughed together! *Who* would have conjectured such arts in the bosom of the timid *débutante* she seemed when I was first presented to her at Lady Barbara's?"

In the course of the evening, his further observation of the altered deportment of the earl confirmed his suspicions. Instead of retreating to the library for the perusal of the newspapers after tea, according to his custom at Greensells, his determination not to lose sight of his sister Sophia kept him stationary in the gallery, where several times in the course of the evening Lord Mortayne made his appearance; and the fair Eleanor being at all times easily approached, the earl entered into conversation with her, simply to prevent the *real* object of his presence being suspected.

While Lady Mary and Lady Blanche were executing together, with much taste, a charming duet of Donizetti (their sisters, Lord Newbury, and Eleanor, being clustered in a picturesque group round the pianoforte by way of audience), Lord Clandon, in whom melomania was not a pronounced foible, sauntered into the embrasure of the window furthest from the musicians, and, as became his present tender mood, drew aside the heavy velvet curtains for the better contemplation of "The moon, resplendent lamp of night."

"He must be deeper in love than I ever expected to see him," thought Charles, who was watching him, "to stand there transfixed, like Cymon in the forest, or some planet-struck astrologer in an observatory!"

The occasion was too tempting to one who had nearly as

little music in his soul as the earl, to join him, in the hope of pushing his discoveries.

"How picturesque the old ramparts look," said he, "under the influence of moonlight! Looking out from hence, one might almost fancy oneself in the romantic castle of Horace Walpole's wild creation."

"When I was in Italy," rejoined Lord Clandon, "I saw, on my way to Sicily, not *the* Castle of Otranto, but the castle *at* Otranto."

"A fine structure?" inquired his companion.

"Very much like three martello towers turned back to back, and situated on a flat shore, which they serve to fortify."

"Far less romantic, in short, than the eagle's nest in which we are standing. I take Heriford to be one of the most elevated *inhabited* sites in the kingdom?"

"It is precisely the height of Stirling Castle. Were it not for the softening influence of the sea, the air would be too keen for a winter residence," replied Lord Clandon; "especially for delicate women. Were I ever to marry, for instance, I should certainly desert Heriford before Christmas, and spend my winters in the south."

"'Were you ever to marry!' and without the 'Heaven forefend,' or 'From which the Lord preserve me!' of your brother Henry! Am I to understand, then, that when your lordship said you should die a bachelor, it was only because you thought you should not live to be married?" said Charles, affecting to be much amused.

"I do not remember having said it," was Lord Clandon's good-humoured reply. "I am not often accused of being a man of too many words."

"At all events, you do not deny the soft impeachment."

"Why should I? To whom am I accountable but to my father?—who, old as he is, would throw up his hat for joy at the mere notion of my wedding."

"*Ca dépend*, I should imagine."

"Upon *what*?"

"Upon the nature of your choice."

"I am not, I hope, likely to make one that would disgrace him!" rejoined the young lord with some hauteur,

for he felt as if Maria were specifically attacked in the insinuation, scarcely supposing it possible but that (the correspondence of Mrs. Barrington with her son having apprized him of his daily visits for a month past to Easton Hoo), a man of Charles's age must surmise the nature and direction of his attachment.

"I, of course, should be the last person to take exceptions to your choice, if my suspicions concerning its object do not mislead me," replied Charles, choosing to exonerate himself, at any cost to his pride, from the imputation of an ill-bred sneer. "*My* admiration, in the same quarter, certainly preceded your own."

Still misled as to his suppositions, all this appeared but natural. Living under the same roof with Maria, her cousin could not but have been cognizant of her charms; while his recent admiration of the *débutante* served equally to reassure Lord Clandon that, whatever might have been his sentiments in earlier years, there remained nothing to alarm him, in the way of rivalry.

"At least," said he, with the blunt frankness of his nature, "I have nothing to apprehend from *your* opposition to my suit?"

"Less than *nothing*," was the emphatic reply. "*I* have long retreated from the field; if indeed I can be said ever to have made advances."

The conversation would have been pursued, and perhaps to their mutual enlightenment, had not Lord Mortayne at that moment entered the gallery, and joined the group beside the instrument. Lord Clandon, who had given up star-gazing and reclosed the curtains, the moment he found himself importuned by a companion, instantly glided from his retreat, and, as if undesignedly, sauntered towards his sisters; leaving Charles Barrington to complete alone his survey of a cabinet of medals that stood in the window, the velvet trays of which he was pretending to examine.

"Was he laughing at me when he made that inquiry?" was the secret cogitation of the fretful egotist, when left alone. "Most likely! and very soon they will laugh at me together! I am only too familiar with the fair Eleanor's tender mercies. It will make a charming subject for her quizzing, to describe the poor clodpole of Easton writing

sonnets to her eyebrow, and so completely mistaking his sphere as to fancy himself a match for the sister of Sir Wolseley Maitland! By Jove! I must be beforehand with her. The match is not yet declared. Not a soul here but myself suspects the truth. Lady Alicia has given me excellent encouragement. This very night I will put her intentions to the test."

Her ladyship's intentions were pretty nearly what might have been expected of a girl of six-and-twenty, without fortune enough to varnish over her want of personal attractions. Submitted, more than suited her aspiring nature, to the authority of a mother and grandmother, and the innovations of three younger sisters, Lady Alicia's sole anxiety was to *trôner* in a house of her own; even if that house were on a less dignified scale than she had once hoped to appropriate.

Having at once referred the suppliant to her mother for an answer to his proposals (as became the daughter of a marchioness and pupil of a couple of high-pressure governesses), she marked her desire that the answer should be favourable, by assuring him that the safest mode of seeking it would be by letter.

"Her mother," she told him, "was guided in all the more important acts of her life by 'grandmamma;' and an epistle, such as could be forwarded to Lady Kilsythe, would be the surest exposition of his wishes and prospects."

That very night, accordingly, the epistle was indited that set forth his hopes and fears, his ways and means, and his ambition of obtaining such distinctions in public life as the united interest of Lord Heriford, and "his mother's cousin and trustee, Lord Coylsfield," might enable him to accomplish. So plausibly, in fact, did he contrive to make the best of himself, showing only the sunny side of the landscape, and causing the mica to glitter like gold, that, by the time he had signed his manifesto, he himself was almost deceived into a conviction, that "he was not so bad a match after all!"

But when, next morning, at breakfast, after the transmission of the letter, he encountered the perpendicular person and stern countenance of Lady Heriford, he began to tremble at his audacity, in having ventured to think himself a worthy son-in-law for a marchioness, standing five feet ten in her

shoes, whose ancestors fought at the Crusades! Now that her ladyship's rigidity was no longer mollified by sherry, nor his own courage strengthened by the envy, hatred, and malice of jealous rivalry, he stood as much in awe of her as though she were frowning upon him from a regal monument in Westminster Abbey.

It was a terrible moment. The hot coffee he was endeavouring to swallow seemed to turn to molten lava, and the egg he attempted to eat might have been a crocodile's! Every face of that long and brilliant breakfast party seemed turned towards him. He fancied he could detect a gleam of wicked triumph in the blue eyes of Eleanor Maitland. He fancied that the smile of Lord Mortayne had a meaning as especial as that of a Lord of the Treasury, while concocting a reply to the opposition member on his legs, who is committing blunder after blunder!

Very sincerely did he wish himself well out of it! What madness could ever have tempted him to swim so much out of his depth!

His agonies were relieved shortly after breakfast, however, by a civil note from the marchioness, requesting a week to deliberate upon "proposals so nearly involving the happiness of her daughter." For such an answer he had been prepared by Lady Alicia; who assured him nothing would be decided till the affair had been submitted to the Dowager Lady Kilsythe. But though the marchioness's mode of addressing him was far from calculated to discourage his hopes, he saw plainly that so remarkable an event in her maternal life as the first offer to one of the four daughters so long on matrimonial thoughts intent, was about to be treated as a grand family solemnity. The ladies of the family went about the house in twos and threes whispering; and the ladies'-maids were seen shuffling about the corridors, from dressing-room to dressing-room, bearing little confidential notes. There was as much fuss, in short, as over the first gudgeon caught in a fashionable fishing party, when, after prodigious efforts, a hot morning has been spent without a nibble.

Lady Mary and Sir Wolseley Maitland exploded into fits of laughter, on catching a glimpse, at the end of the gallery, of the couple of victims marked out for sacrifice. But the

rest of the party looked gravely and consequentially upon the matter, except Lord Henry and his gay associates, who affected to retreat in dismay whenever Charles Barrington approached, as though he bore about him fatal symptoms of the plague.

“Go out shooting with us?” cried his lordship, on his future brother-in-law’s hazarding the proposal; “not for worlds! The ominous red cross of the *pestiféré*, my dear fellow, is inscribed on your breast.”

“We should be having you mistake one of us for a hen-pheasant,” added Sir Wolseley; “and I, for one, have no taste for receiving the charge of your gun in my calves!”

Had not Charles Barrington been too much accustomed, while paying his court to the fair Eleanor, to put up with her brother’s impertinence, to become suddenly resentful, a bitter retort about calf-shooting was on the tip of his tongue. It was provoking enough that, while Lady Heriford insisted, on *his* part, on the strictest secrecy concerning his pretensions, she seemed to have placed the whole house in her confidence!

Now, everybody knows, who knows the ways of the frivolous, that though, on the announcement of a marriage as a settled thing, *both* halves of the happy couple are immediately converted into angels,—the young lady into the “lovely and accomplished daughter of ——” and the intended, into “a very good fellow,” a “young man of considerable promise,” or, “a man of the highest respectability,”—the moment such an affair is what is called “upon the *tapis*,” everybody does his worst, and says his worst, for the frustration of the project. Each of the parties might do better, or, neither of the parties could do worse; and their friends are strenuously entreated to interfere, and save them from lasting misery, before it be too late. Never, in short, are the propensities of the busybody, and the energies of the mischief-maker, more actively developed than in attempts to break off a match.

It would have been difficult for a woman who had begun to despair of having such an article as a son-in-law ever placed at her disposal, to refrain from talking over the business with the married ladies staying in the house; who usually met in conclave in her dressing-room after break-

fast, for the arrangement of the plans for the day: and still more difficult for such persons as Lady Barbara Bernardo, who knew her own alliance with the Old Jewry to have been so unsparingly dissected by the great world; and the prudent Countess of Essendon, who, having five flax-headed angels in backboards and flounced trowsers, training up for the slave-market, considered it her duty as a mother to keep up the price of ladyships,—to abstain from trying to put down an aspiring nobody, who had a mind to secure his worldly promotion through the talisman of a wedding-ring.

Lady Heriford was “entreated to be cautious;” to ascertain the exact whereabouts of Mr. Barrington’s paternal acres,—the precise nature of his “eventualities;” and, though Lord Clandon, albeit unconfided in by his mother, replied, on being indirectly questioned, that “the Barringtons of Easton were an ancient Buckinghamshire family, whose present representative was a well-educated gentleman, and a man of independent fortune,” every other individual in the house, to whom the subject was submitted, “begged to let it be distinctly understood, that *they* knew nothing whatever about Mr. Barrington. They had seen him in London, that season, for the first time, paying somewhat marked attentions to Miss Maitland; but with what justification they could not presume to say.”

All this was disparaging enough. At the close of two or three days, the future bridegroom skulked about the castle in lonesome ostracism, looking very much as if he had been detected in an attempt to purloin the family plate, and had a capital indictment impending over him, on a probation of good behaviour; and, had he known how to accomplish such a feat with the same sangfroid, he would probably have ordered post-horses, after the Mortayne fashion, and started for the Pyramids.

What, therefore, was his surprise when, on joining, on the fifth day, the party awaiting in the saloon the sounding of the dinner gong, he was welcomed by Lady Essendon, who for two days past had scarcely addressed him, with the most eager inquiries concerning his morning’s sport. Everybody seemed as glad to see him as if they had not seen him for an age; which was partly the case, as they had, one and

all, appeared to forget he was in the house. Meshech Bernardo inquired whether he had seen the morning papers, and what was the state of the railway market; while Lady Barbara observed, in an audible whisper to Lord Henry de Capell, that Mr. Barrington's waistcoat buttons were "the greatest ducks she had ever seen in her life."

"I hope you will ride with us to-morrow, Mr. Barrington," said Lady Mary de Capell. "We had capital fun this morning, getting across the hills. Sir Wolseley's horse was twice nearly down, and my sister Blanche's mare came home dead lame."

"I have inquired about the seventh number of the Heriford Gallery, my dear Barrington," added Lord Henry, and the publishers say it was sent to your hotel in town."

It was only the old marquis, whose manner towards him had never varied from the condescending pomposity of one whose consequence is based on a square of fifty thousand acres (simply because he was not yet acquainted with his matrimonial pretensions), who retained his usual superannuated Sir Charles Grandison-ism.

Involuntarily the young man glanced towards the place on the sofa near the fire, usually occupied by Lady Heriford, to ascertain whether the mother of Lady Alicia had, like the rest, abated a cubit of her stature. But the post of honour was vacant. Her ladyship's favourite pug-dog sat curling its tail and nose at the company, on a satin footstool before the empty seat, but no signs of its mistress.

"Something extraordinary must have occurred!" mused Charles: for Lady Heriford, if she exhibited a few of the narrownesses and tiresomenesses of the whole school, was a model of its many virtues, such as filial duty and punctuality. Invariably beforehand with her guests, she was never known to keep even a tradesperson waiting.

While he directed his eyes towards the place and pug, those of the rest of the party were turned with one accord towards the door. In another moment, an unusual noise in that direction caused him to follow their example, and lo! he beheld Lady Alicia enter the room with a little old woman leaning upon her arm, arrayed from top to toe in white, with black lace pinnars and a black lace cloak over

her shoulders, to prevent her looking as if *vouée au blanc*; the marchioness of Heriford and Lady Sophia gravely bringing up the rear.

“Grandmamma, for a thousand!” thought he, with a rising glow, as, at the tapping of her high-heeled shoes upon the carpet, everybody rose to greet the Dowager Lady Kilsythe, as they would have done the presence of some royal personage. And from the fact that, of all her grandchildren, Lady Alicia had been selected for the honour of becoming the old lady’s walking-stick, he deduced a favourable omen.

Slinking behind the double petticoat of *gros grain* of Lady Barbara Bernardo, as the silvery-haired dowager proceeded past him on her way to the place of honour ceded to her by her daughter, he could not but be impressed by the reverential manner in which she was saluted by all present,—even the marquis, who was ten years older than herself.

“I was driving out when your ladyship so unexpectedly arrived this afternoon,” said he, as soon as Lady Kilsythe was seated, “or I should not have deferred till now my inquiries after your health.”

“Never better,—or you would not see me here!” was her cheerful reply. “Crazy vessels should not venture out of port. God be thanked, I am stout enough for any sea.”

The early intimacy of Charles Barrington with Lord Henry de Capell had long rendered him cognizant of grandmamma’s extraordinary influence in the family synod; and the government exercised by an old woman always carries with it, in the vague, an ignominious impression. But if he had formerly wondered at the submission of people so great as the marquis and marchioness, to one of such small account as a viscountess dowager, of small estate, he was much more inclined to wonder, now the little eccentric-looking bundle was before him. He had still to learn the importance which a positive and consistent will may assign to any person possessed of strength and courage to maintain it.

Lady Kilsythe had been left at a very early age a widow, with two children and a moderate fortune. In the course

of half a century, the moderate fortune had become a large one, because she lived considerably within its limits: while over the two children, now an old man and old woman—Lord Kilsythe and the Marchioness of Heriford—she retained unlimited authority, from having early instructed them to look upon filial piety as the first of Christian duties.

“I don’t much think my mother would have contrived to impress *us* with the same blind deference towards grandmamma,” was Lord Henry de Capell’s account of the matter to his friend, “had not the old lady laid by some fifty or sixty thousand pounds, which she may leave to any one of us she pleases; or, if none of us please her, to a stranger: facts on which my mother never fails to lay stress, when exhorting us to a dutiful deportment towards the dowager. ‘*I* never take a seat in her presence,’ quoth she, ‘till invited. Such was the custom when I was young. But even duties seem altered now.’”

The weight ascribed by Lord Henry to the fifty thousand pounds at grandmamma’s disposal was not altogether supposititious. But the real cause of her grasp on the minds of all belonging to her, was that she was a shrewd, outspoken, straightforward woman. Lady Kilsythe was not to be imposed upon. An epithet had no power over her ear. A fact was stripped stark naked, like a child upon her knee, before she admitted it to be a fine one.

“You wrote me word, my dear Susan,” said she, on accosting the marchioness that morning, “that a young gentleman, with a modest income, and tolerable competence in prospect, of good character and abilities, was desirous of marrying Lady Alicia, and that my opinion on the subject would decide you whether to accept or refuse him.”

“Since then,” replied Lady Heriford, with an embarrassed air, “I have re-considered the matter; and, considering Alicia’s birth and connexions, I really think she has a right to require something beyond the son of a small Buckinghamshire squire. I did not intend giving you further trouble on the subject, my dear mother, than an answer to my letter.”

“That is, you neither dreamed nor meant that I should come and judge with my own eyes and ears, before I pronounced judgment! And now tell me, pray, what other

means of settling in life have Alicia's birth and connexions obtained her?"

The marchioness, on terms of unlimited confidence with her mother, was forced to admit, by an expressive gesture of her hands and shoulders, that this was her daughter's first offer.

"And she is seven-and-twenty, or thereabouts?"

"Six-and-twenty, in March."

"Where did she pick up this Mr. Barrington?"

"He is a college friend of her brother Henry," said the marchioness, implicitly obeying the dowager's catechization, like a patient ordered by a physician to put out his tongue, or extend his wrist.

"By which," resumed the dowager, "I find he has had a liberal education. Abilities good?"

"He takes a respectable part in general conversation; and, above all, is desirous of working his way in public life."

"I do not ask about his temper or deportment," resumed grandmamma, "for it is hard but a man trying to recommend himself as a suitor, can control one and humanize the other. But, knowing what I do of my grandson Henry, who is banality itself, I am pretty sure he would not have chosen for a friend a man otherwise than popular among his companions."

"Mr. Barrington is, I admit, extremely popular," replied Lady Heriford; "though, within the last few days, every one here has taken to abusing him."

"Have they? A good sign! All I hear of him is satisfactory. But besides *his* merits, the demerits of my granddaughter must be allowed their weight. As I have often observed to you, my dear Susan, in deliberating upon other affairs of life, you must take the matter between your two hands, and examine it by turning and re-turning it with as little compunction as would be felt by a stranger. Alicia is, I will not say 'gone off,' for she was never *on*; but plainer even than she used to be. A great match she has no claim to make; and being generally considered, in the world, a sharp, disagreeable girl, not even a small one has sought her acceptance. You must not be displeased, my dear—I tell you wholesome truths, as in childhood I administered, when sick, a nauseous medicine. Instead, there-

fore, of being foolishly fastidious, be thankful for the opportunity of settling one of your girls. After their father's death, which in the course of nature cannot be far off, they will fall fifty per cent. in consequence. Let me see this young man. If I find him a rational being (as the powers of calculation shown in his choice announce him to be), I will allow the young people five hundred a-year, till the marquis gets him provided for; on condition that *his* family can produce eight. With the interest of the ten thousand pounds she is entitled to under your settlement, this will secure them a competence. If, being young, they want more, they are great fools; if, being old, they have not achieved more, they are still greater."

All this, or as much as was necessary of it, having been communicated to Lady Alicia, and hailed as earnest of other favours hereafter, was gratefully accepted. The match was announced in the house, as "under the especial patronage of the Right Hon. Dowager Lady Kilsythe;" and, from that moment, every hand was extended to Charles Barrington, and the letter already adverted to despatched to Easton Hoo, demanding the consent and assistance of his parents.

CHAPTER XV

But what was bad, she did not blush in turn,

Nor seem embarrass'd,—quite the contrary;—
Her aspect was as usual,—still, not stern;

And she withdrew, but cast not down, her eye.
Yet grew a little pale,—with what,—concern?—

I know not, but her colour ne'er was high,
Though sometimes faintly flush'd; and always clear
As deep seas in a sunny atmosphere.—BYRON.

WHEN Lord Clandon reached Heriford Castle, it was his intention to make his electioneering interests a pretext for returning to Greensells the moment the departure of Lord Mortayne satisfied him that the tranquillity of his sister Sophia was in safety.

It was in vain that the amiable girl, to whom, in return

for all the confidence she had reposed in him, he did not scruple to confide that he flattered himself he had found a woman with whom his brilliant prospects in life would not weigh an atom in the scale, if she consented to accept his hand, entreated him to hasten back to the object of his love. It was in vain she assured him that her feelings were now at rest; and that, so far from his nourishing resentment against Lord Mortayne on her account, he ought to be thankful to one who had found courage to break off the intimacy, on discovering that he did not love her with the warmth of affection indispensable to married life; rather than, with ill-calculated deference to the opinion of her family and society, make her a morose and repining husband.

Say what she would, however, Lord Clandon would not hear of quitting the house, so long as there remained in it a man who might possibly become the object of maternal manœuvres, to the disparagement of a sister whom he justly regarded as one of the most high-minded as well as true-hearted of her sex.

No symptoms appeared, however, of breaking up the party. In a mansion so remote as Heriford Castle, visits are not calculated on the same petty scale as in the neighbourhood of town. To be asked for a day to Greensells, was the same as being invited for a fortnight to Heriford. People could not be expected to come so far, unless on terms of intimacy to justify a prolonged visitation.

Poor Clan had, consequently, some pretext for wishing that the domains of his ancestors were nearer London. The grouse and black cock to be found on his father's moors afforded small compensation (especially at that season of the year when pheasant shooting had commenced) for absenting himself from contemplation! of the sweet face, in whose light he had sunned himself till all the gruffness of his nature was melted away. For even old Lady Kilsythe, who had long assigned to her grandson the name of Orson, now greeted him with the more gracious one of Valentine.

The old lady appeared to be in especial good humour. Having had some cause to apprehend that she should leave the world without seeing the foundations laid for a new generation of her family—her son, Lord Kilsythe, being childless, so as to vest its future representation solely with

the De Capells — she was charmed at the unexpected start taken by Lady Alicia.

“By pretending to do too well, people do nothing,” said she to her grand-daughter. “We should drink of the spring that rises nearest to us, and be thankful. You had no right, my dear, to the thirty thousand pounds prize. A pretty face and pretty fortune, like Miss Maitland’s, can afford to wait for another bite. But you have acted like a wise girl, Alicia, in not throwing back into the stream the fish on your hook, as not worth taking.”

But though the influence of grandmamma in the De Capell family was such as to insure towards young Barrington the good offices of its members, there were others of the party to whom his luck was wormwood. Sir Wolseley Maitland, cheap as he held him, especially after a survey of his stables at Easton, had always regarded Charles as the man destined to relieve him from a charge that rendered his Cub Castle a penitentiary. Though ambitious that his sister should form a better match, he would far rather have seen her Mrs. Barrington than Miss Maitland. He wanted to be his own master. He wanted to be at liberty to come and go. It would be *too* hard to have Eleanor hampering his hands another winter: instead of being able to fill Wolseley Hall, according to his taste, with the *élite* of the bad company of London,—women having been so much talked about, that the less said of them the better; and men who, by staking their necks on a timber-jump, and their fortunes on a card or race, showed that they estimated them at their just value.

He had suffered himself to be decoyed to Greensells to undergo the *corvée* of saying civil things to Lady Mary De Capell, solely with the view of ascertaining young Barrington’s eligibility; and though, for the weakness of having been persuaded to follow the family to Heriford Castle, there was the excuse to his egotism of capital shooting, he could hardly forgive himself, and by no means forgive Eleanor, for having been taken in. His self-love prevented him, however, from admitting, even to *her*, that he had miscalculated.

“I suppose you don’t want to stay at this confounded place much longer?” said he to his sister, with whom he had sought an interview in her dressing-room. “I sub-

mitted to the visit, because, for some reason or other, you seemed to wish it. But now that we have shot over the best preserves, and that the hateful little old woman with her owl-like eyes is come to complete the detestabilities of the place, I have made up my mind to be off."

"With all my heart!" replied Eleanor coolly, though the announcement was a death-blow to her projects. "But will not our abrupt departure, immediately after the announcement of Lady Alicia's marriage, look odd?"

"The only word worth listening to I have heard from the lips of Lady Kilsythe, since she entered the castle, was what she said yesterday at breakfast ——"

"That servants bribed to discretion, keep the money, but not the secret?"

"What has that to do with our leaving Heriford Castle? No,—that half the pleasures and profits within our reach are lost from the dread of doing or saying what may be thought 'odd.'"

"Surely Lord Mortayne's philosophy is better: that we should triumph over public opinion, if only to treat it *en pays conquis*—trample on it, and load it with chains."

"Mortayne seems to have been inoculated with despotism in his Eastern travels."

"I rather think, on the contrary, that he grows his principles in St. James's Street," replied the fair Eleanor, with a smile. "At least, they savour of the soil."

"Say rather, of the bad old times!" retorted her brother, who had more than once rebuked her growing intimacy with one so little likely to improve her matrimonial prospects. "It is not bad fun to hear him and Vassall dragging their old-fashioned *rouéism* out of the lumber-room, and trying to put it off upon fellows like myself and Henry de Capell, as the right thing! The world has been spinning round faster than he fancies, I can tell him; and the folks in it became wider awake, while he was coddling himself into a mummy. Mortayne has ceased to be a young man, and had better submit to be an old woman."

"The distaff is sometimes as sharp an implement as a *cravache*," retorted Eleanor almost angrily. "But, to come to the point concerning which you wished to confer with me, I am quite at your orders about returning to Wolseley Hall.

I am going to drive, after luncheon, with Lady Heriford and the dowager, and will acquaint her with the day you fix for our departure.”

So said, so done; and, precisely as she had anticipated, Lady Heriford would not hear of her going. Lady Kilsythe had confirmed her daughter's projects against Sir Wolseley, by admitting that he was the very husband for Lady Mary: —“two empty heads, and a sufficiently large estate to prevent their knocking too hard against each other,” was the opinion expressed by the old lady. It was consequently declared to be impossible that Miss Maitland should quit her friend Alicia previous to the wedding; which, that grand-mamma might be present at the ceremony, was to take place in a fortnight, at the cost of some nights' rest to the London milliners and lawyers' clerks.

“If Sir Wolseley were so impatient to get home, he must go, on condition of returning to fetch her after the wedding.”

Nothing could better suit her *plan de campagne*; and as Sir Wolseley, in order to secure a fortnight's liberty, consented both to go and come back, the whole family was content. Lord Henry, who had discovered the unavowed enmity subsisting between the *débutante* and his future brother-in-law, found sufficient amusement, in the intervals of sporting, in watching the enormous circles described twenty times a-day by both, to evade the chance of a *tête-à-tête*. Two charlatans, afraid of each other's discernment in tricks, could not have been more carefully distant!

The *futur* of Lady Alicia was, however, the only member of the party to whom the society of the fair Eleanor was otherwise than acceptable. Youth, beauty, and good spirits, are strong recommendations to those for whom surface is all in all; and the desire to please imparted a suavity to her manner which, in more triumphant days, had been wanting. After she had submitted to listen, without winking an eyelash, to old Vassall's longest stories about Carlton House, and to look convinced, whenever he affected confusion about a certain brooch he chose to wear (the hair concealed beneath the concealed spring of which was a decided case of brown silk)—after she had rejoiced the heart of old Lady Kilsythe by singing “Where the Bee sucks,” and other melodies of Arne, in which Lady Heriford had excelled in

her youth, but which her daughters declared to be incompatible with their bravuras;—after she had submitted to have her beautiful new dress *à mille raies*, spoiled by the muddy paws of Lord Henry's favourite retriever, and her flounces torn by the spur of that much ruder animal, Meschech Bernardo;—after she had lost a sufficient number of games at backgammon to the old marquis;—allowed Lady Blanche to pass off upon her as her own, bitter criticisms from Fraser or Blackwood, diluted with fashionable orgeat and water,—and all her French fripperies to be soiled by the pattern-talking of Lady Blanche's maid—she was voted an angel by the whole house: an angel, to whose charms and virtues most of them wished, though few of them expected, the heir of the house of Heriford sooner or later to devote his homage.

“You have taken compassion on us then, and acceded to Lady Heriford's entreaties?” whispered Lord Mortayne to her, on the evening of Sir Wolseley's departure; and when she accused him, in a tone of common-place coquetry, of indifference to her comings and goings, far more sincere than he suspected were his declarations that, had she quitted the Castle, he should not have tarried long behind.

Like other persons gradually indulging in the use of ardent spirits, he knew not how essential was becoming to him the stimulus of her lively sallies, her buoyant mind, her speaking face. Though aware that there were moments when, however eagerly questioned concerning his Eastern adventures, he had not a syllable to say, it did not occur to him that they invariably occurred during the absence from the room of the fair creature who, on most occasions when he was relating his “hairbreadth 'scapes” and wanderings in the wild, hung entranced upon his words, and by a single glance caused a flood of eloquence to gush from the rock. He did not even surmise that his growing disgust at the muddy complexions, shapeless forms, and shrill intonation of the Ladies de Capell, was produced by contrast with the waxen cheeks, slender waist, and feminine tones of Eleanor.

Forming, as they did, part of the same circle, it was easy for Lord Mortayne to enjoy, without committing himself, the warmth of her sunny smiles and the excitement of her amusing conversation. Day after day, evening after even-

ing, he listened and looked, fancying that he was looking and listening only like Lord Harry, or old Vassall, or any other member of the party; and had any one suggested that, on the day when that brilliant being was no longer at hand to afford recreation to his ears and eyes, he would discover a grievous blank in his existence, he would have scouted the idea.

"Take care what you are about," old Vassall had one day whispered to him, after finding him engaged with the fair Eleanor in the library, looking over the works of Malherbe for some stanzas which Mortayne had suggested to her as peculiarly adapted to be set to music;—"I only say, take care what you are about!"

"It does not need, my dear fellow," was his indignant rejoinder; "the hemp is not yet grown that would make a net strong enough for *me*."

"I was not thinking of *that*," retorted the fossile *roué*, "I was thinking of *her*, poor girl! Do not break her heart, as you did poor Lady Sophia's. Remember how I warned you *then*."

"I was three years and four fevers younger at that time!" said Lord Mortayne, a little embarrassed. "Breaking hearts is no longer in my department."

"As if you did not know that the pretty *débutante* was over head and ears in love with you!" cried Vassall, poking him facetiously in the side; for, as Lord Mortayne's teeth and hair were his own (a proprietorship to which, for five-and-twenty years past, *he* had not pretended), he looked upon him as a dissipated boy. "No one who saw her watching you from the windows of the saloon, the day you attempted to drive that confounded pair of greys round the court-yard, which were doing their best to kick Clandon's phaëton to pieces, could doubt the nature of her feelings."

"Perhaps she was anxious for the fate of Clandon's phaëton. It is amazing the interest taken by young ladies in the property of a marquis expectant!"

"And Sultan, I suppose, is the property of a marquis expectant,—whom every day I see her take in to luncheon, and cram with chicken, while you are out shooting?"

"*That* may arise from the instinctive contrariety of her sex!" replied Mortayne, listening with secret delight to the

assertions he pretended to parry; "for she has heard me say, a hundred times, how much I dislike my dog to be fed with anything but bread and water."

"Very well—very well! I dare to say *you* know best!" rejoined old Vassall, fractiously. "I only beg to observe that poor dear Lady Caroline, whom the poor dear Regent used always to charge with having done such outrageous things, and said such outrageous things to catch me, some years ago—in the pavilion days—or, rather, before the pavilion days, at Mrs. Fitzherbert's (but, for Heaven's sake, do not mention it, it might do me a serious injury!) never said or did a thousandth part of what I have seen said and done on your account by Sir Wolseley Maitland's sister; the prettiest *débutante* of the season, and a fortune of fifty thousand pounds!"

"My dear Vassall, you are dreaming!"

"I wish I could dream in the same way on my own account!" persisted the old beau. "I promise you she would not be Miss Maitland long."

"She would make a charming Mrs. Vassall, certainly!" cried Lord Mortayne, with an indignant sneer.

"However, if you have other engagements, you are certainly quite right to give her no encouragement," added his companion. "I have always had on my conscience a thoughtless flirtation, with which I hampered myself some years ago with the present Duchess of Alva, when she was pretty Louisa Hervey?"

"The mother of the present duke?"

"I meant nothing, of course," continued Vassall, not choosing to hear; "at the age I then was—just quitting college—*who* means anything? However, *she* thought otherwise, poor thing; and her family were so much alarmed by the results, that, when they saw my intentions were not serious and her illness *was*, they carried her off to Nice."

"Which appears to have been tolerably efficacious, for she is now a jolly old dame!"

"Yes! on her return, the Duke of Alva, after hearing the story, proposed to her—purely from compassion; so that I have always considered myself the author of her brilliant match. But, for Heaven's sake, never mention it—it

might be a serious injury to her. Above all things, my dear Mortayne, never compromise a woman. I——”

“I shall certainly take care not to compromise Miss Maitland,” was his lordship’s rejoinder; though in a less assured voice.

“But you must also take care not to wound her feelings by a too sudden withdrawal. I recollect, some years since, at Devonshire House, in the late duchess’s time——”

“But, have you ever heard Miss Maitland’s name coupled with mine, my dear Vassall, by any one besides yourself?” interrupted Mortayne.

“There was a very charming girl,” gravely persisted the old beau, “a daughter of old General Rupee—and, as it was supposed, heiress to his immense fortune——”

“Or, have you ever had reason to fancy that——”

“Her preference for *me* was, I cannot deny, sufficiently manifest. But I, you know, my dear Mortayne, am not a marrying man! One day, in order to open her eyes——”

“Yes; you have often told me the story. But I should be *really* glad of your opinion concerning the mode in which——”

“I frankly said as much before her face to the old general. The girl fainted; and I verily believe her father would have called me out on the spot, had not the Dowager Lady Caumicauley (a fast friend of mine) stepped forward to assure him that it was only the heat of the room. But pray never mention the circumstance. One ought, above all things, to avoid compromising a woman; and Miss Rupee being now the happy wife of old Admiral Rousham——”

“One of her grandsons might, perhaps, call you to account!” was the bitter retort of the impatient Lord Mortayne. But, though fully sensible of the absurdity of Vassall’s vauntings on his own account, he could not immediately efface from his mind all that had been said in reference to Eleanor Maitland.

Having shaken off the superannuated beau by retreating to his own room, he threw himself into a chair (and none but personages in novels, or people in love, ever “throw themselves into a chair,” seeing that it is more natural to take a seat in a quiet way!),—he threw himself into a chair, and began to ruminate on past, present, and to

come, with a confusion of ideas and palpitation of heart he had never experienced since he fell into a similar fit of musing four years before, in that very house, on perceiving himself to be an object of attachment to Lady Sophia de Capell.

In that instance, his reverie had ended in an order for post-horses. But Lady Sophia was plain, and Lady Sophia was poor. The vanity of the musing man was not then tickled as now, when the woman courting his acceptance was a fortune and a beauty. Lady Heriford made no secret of her desire that Sir Wolseley's sister should become her daughter-in-law. Yet she was supposed to prefer *him*,—a man notoriously embarrassed,—to a good-looking fellow of Clandon's age, with a marquise and thirty thousand a year in immediate expectation!

There was really some excuse for his rising and looking in the glass, to ascertain the amount of personal recommendations left him by late hours, lansquenets and hot climates, as an excuse for her weakness. But alas! what he beheld there was far from re-assuring. In Charles Barrington's well-turned figure and manly face there was some pretext for the prepossession of Lady Alicia. But in his own sallow complexion, ineffaceable crowsfeet, and scanty hair, a thousand arguments were apparent against the possibility that the fancy he had inspired should become permanent.

"Till she knew me," reflected poor Mortayne, "she was acquainted only with boys—the ill-bred boys of the day,—whose conversation consists of slang and boasting. It is but natural she should prefer the society of a man who has seen the world, and understands the deference due to her sex. After all, she is a mere girl,—a *débutante* of the recent season,—and still a slave to first impressions."

But then came the startling reflection that first impressions are usually the most permanent; and that if she really preferred him as much as Vassall assured him was the case, it must be at her own uninfluenced suggestion.

There was no officious mother,—no meddling *chaperon*, to say,—“Lord Mortayne would be a good match for you. Though a spendthrift and half-ruined, he has conquered a place in the grand *monde*, which any woman might be proud

to share." For the only female connection she appeared to possess, the only *chaperon* who could be supposed to actuate her sentiments, was Lady Heriford, who avowedly wanted her for her son.

It was, therefore, the spontaneous voice of nature that had spoken in his favour; and considering the hints he had received from Sir Alan Harkesley and Lord Alfred, and even from his more cordial friend, the owner of the blue cab, that his day was done, and that he had better seek comfort for his declining years in a nightgown and slippers,—it was somewhat edifying that the prettiest *débutante* of the year should have singled him from a host of admirers.

"If I were mad enough to give her the option of rendering herself miserable for life by marrying such a wretch as myself," pursued the perplexed Mortayne, "we should only be able to make up four thousand a year between us, and no hope for the future,—not the chance of a windfall of any kind to brighten her existence, when she finds me growing old by her side! I will not *think*, however, of such cursed folly! It is like the weakness of feeling the edge of a poniard, or examining the locks of one's pistols."

He *did* think of it, however, and whether he would or no. The whole thoughts of Heriford Castle were in fact running, just then, upon love and matrimony. Nothing was talked about but settlements, wedding dresses, and orange flowers. Charles Barrington triumphant beyond his utmost hopes,—triumphant with the joy of having distanced the fair coquette who had sported with his feelings, and still more with the dawn of prospects so cheering to his ambition, that in the brightness of his new destinies he actually forgot the cause which had originally prompted him to make Lady Alicia his object,—made a lover far from despicable. His personal appearance qualified him admirably for a Romeo; and under the influence of her new-found happiness, the ugly girl had become almost well looking. The flush of consciousness coloured her hitherto pale cheek, and a gleam of joy brightened her haughty eyes.

"If I thought that love would work such miracles of regeneration for me as for Lady Alicia," murmured the languid Mortayne, "it would be worth while to make the trial."

Meanwhile, with the tact for manœuvring which a cunning nature imbibes in the atmosphere of fashionable life, as readily as a piece of cotton, patterned with mordent, the tinge of the dying vat, Miss Maitland appeared artlessly unconscious of having excited either interest or anxiety on the part of Lord Mortayne. Seizing every occasion to throw herself in his way, many a time was he startled, in what he intended should be a solitary ramble with Sultan, in the half-wild shrubberies fringing the hill-side from the lofty site of the Castle to the plain below, by the fluttering of white draperies in some transverse alley, which proved to be the fair Eleanor, either on the arm of Lady Blanche (who, fancying herself wonderfully clever, was easily made a dupe, and had been dragged out as a blind), or quite alone, with her portfolio under her arm, looking for peeps of the old turrets through the trees, to afford a subject for a sketch.

On Lord Mortayne's assurance that, at so advanced a season of the year, her project could only be accomplished at the risk of a severe cold, nothing was easier than to resign the portfolio to his hands, and submit to be accompanied back to the glacis. The ascent was so steep, and the way, in consequence, so winding, that their deliberate return afforded ample opportunity for familiar talk; and people in love will hazard twice as much in the way of avowal in the open air, as in a close chamber, where every word they utter seems to be registered.

After listening, from the sweet lips of his graceful companion, to declarations, apparently unstudied as the waving of the fern that skirted their path, that she disliked a London life,—that her utmost desire was to pass the remainder of her days in the wholesome quiet of the country, secure from the tumults and heart-burnings of the gay world,—it would have been very, *very* difficult not to whisper in return that she was an angel!

CHAPTER XVI.

There is in human nature, generally, more of the fool than wise ; and therefore those faculties by which the foolish part of men's minds is taken are most potent.—BACON.

FORTUNE is said to favour the bold : and the blind goddess certainly exerted herself to some purpose to prosper the audacity of Charles Barrington in presuming on the impression he had made on Lady Alicia de Capell, to ask for her hand. For before the letter reached him, in which his mother communicated the churlish views of his less malleable parent, the death of Mrs. General Tarleton placed at Mrs. Barrington's disposal the four hundred a-year jointure, which, at her prosperous marriage, had been settled exclusively on herself.

Satisfied that neither bitterness nor sternness would avail to prevent her making it over to her son, Mr. Barrington wisely refrained from interference ; and the same day which brought from Heriford Castle the future bridegroom's ready assent to the shabby terms proposed by his father, witnessed the despatch of new conditions. Mr. and Mrs. Barrington were conjointly to add five hundred a-year to the sum allowed by his uncle ; and the young couple would consequently begin life with a clear income of two thousand.

This arrangement, and the liberal gift of a thousand pounds in ready money from Lady Kilsythe, which superseded all necessity for a donation on the part of Mr. Barrington, removed his few remaining objections to the match ; and he had now no difficulty in discovering that, for an empty-headed fellow, scarcely knowing a pea from a bean, Charles had done a capital thing for himself. He had traded on the good looks and prepossessing manners which were all he had to boast of, and the venture was bringing him two hundred per cent. The surly proprietor of Easton was, in fact, nearer being in good humour and good spirits than he had been since the bankruptcy of the firm in whose speculations his property was invested.

“ Attend the wedding ?—Yes, of course, he would attend

the wedding! It was a respect due to the family who were acting with such unparalleled liberality towards his son." Of personal feelings towards that son, he was candid enough to say nothing. It is not so easy to improvise affection towards one who, for three-and-twenty years, has been an object of vituperation, as to order home a wedding garment, and resolve to wear it with a smiling face.

"The devil of it is," said he, on the evening when these arrangements were decided on by the first fire allowed at the Hoo for the season,—though the nights had been so long frosty as to require the housing of Maria's geraniums;—"the devil of it is, that posting it, as on such an occasion we must do,—and consequently absorbing four days for the journey there and back, besides the week which the marchioness exacts of us that we may become acquainted with, that is, be made acquainted with the old dowager who seems to have adopted my son as her own,—we cannot be away from Easton less than ten days; and I just give you to guess, Mrs. Barrington, what goings on there will be here, during our absence! Everything given up to idleness and waste! I doubt whether we should find a faggot to burn or a vegetable to eat, when we came back. During the four-and-twenty hours I was away at Greensells, I had five pounds' worth of damage done on the premises, by Watts and the other vagabonds in my service!"

"But surely, uncle, you can trust *me*?" interposed Maria, who was sitting in the shade, at some distance from the fireplace. "I will take care that your orders are punctually obeyed while you are away."

"*You*?" retorted Mr. Barrington. "A fine bailiff you would make, truly, even if it were possible for you to be on the spot. But you know very well that you are included in the marchioness's invitation. Considering the kindness shown you by the family, at Greensells, you could hardly doubt it."

"I am aware that Lady Heriford has had the kindness to ask me," she replied, with some embarrassment. "But I am so out of place in large parties, that I begged my aunt to be kind enough to excuse me."

"I can't say you seemed to think yourself out of place at Greensells!" observed Mr. Barrington, coarsely. "I

never saw a young lady of your age more completely at her ease."

"From childishness—from ignorance," replied Miss Brenton, in self-defence. "Such a family as Lord Heriford's appeared so remote in condition from my own, that I approached them without restraint. But now that—now——"

"Now that you perceive the possibility of a nearer connection with them," said her aunt, coming kindly to her relief, "you feel more embarrassed. Natural enough, perhaps. But still, my dear Maria, as I told you from the first, I think it will be noticed unkindly if you absent yourself from your cousin's wedding."

"Who notices anything about a person so insignificant as myself?" murmured the poor girl, in a strangely altered voice.

"Our neighbours; who do not appear disposed, just now, to view any of our proceedings in a favourable light. Nothing can excuse the spitefulness of Lady Chalkneys and her husband; like the Opposition in Parliament, always bitterest after Government has obtained a victory."

"I do not think her ill-nature very much signifies," said Maria, despondingly. "But, after all, what can she say? That I am not invited—which we know to be untrue."

"Not exactly *that*, my dear!"

Miss Brenton seemed afraid of inquiring further, for she said not a word.

"I fancy Lord Clandon's frequent visits to Easton excited some surmise in the neighbourhood," added Mrs. Barrington, perceiving that she avoided the question; "and they will probably think that you resent his abrupt departure for the North."

"Oh! if that be the worst inference they have to make," cried Maria, resuming her cheerfulness, "let them say it, and welcome! I care little for any remarks in which they may indulge, relative to Lord Clandon. But the fact is, dear aunt, no one will discover, till your return, that I did not accompany you; and then, they will be too full of curiosity about the wedding and Heriford Castle, even to think of me."

"As you please!" said Mr. Barrington, cutting short

the argument. "I suppose you are like other misses, and want to be implored and besought to do what you have never dreamed of leaving undone. However, I shall disappoint you. Come or go, it is all one to me. Only, if you stay, I shall request you not to put me to unnecessary expense for housekeeping, when it would be more convenient to leave the family on board wages."

Maria felt the swelling in her throat, which had of late become habitual, a little more painful than usual; and some minutes afterwards, as Mrs. Barrington crossed the room in search of her carpet-work, she paused, unobserved, beside the poor girl's chair, and gently pressed her niece's hand within her own.

On the morrow, however, all necessity for altercation between the uncle and niece was superseded. A letter—a letter, in Charles's own handwriting, addressed to his cousin, and for the first time containing no commission to be executed at Easton, expressed his earnest desire that Maria would accompany his parents on their expedition to the North.

On discerning the emotion with which the invitation was perused by her niece, Mrs. Barrington almost repented having written to entreat that Charles would not, on occasion of his prosperous marriage, wholly overlook the amiable companion of his boyhood. When she saw how thoroughly Maria was deceived into the belief that her feelings on the occasion were appreciated by her cousin, she felt ashamed of having lent her aid towards the imposition. But it was, in fact, the good aunt herself who was imposed upon, in the notion that anything *she* could plead would have influenced Charles, at such a moment, to take the smallest trouble for what did not exactly concern his personal comfort.

The truth was, that the closer intimacy into which he was now brought with Lord Clandon had certified him not alone of his indifference towards his mother's *protégée*, the *débutante*, but of his heartfelt admiration of Maria; and though it had required some days to induce Charles Barrington's belief of the possibility of such a selection on the part of a man having all England to choose from, yet, when incredulity became no longer possible, he was not slow to perceive that a marriage between Maria and the earl was

scarcely less reconcilable with probability than the match he was himself making. Satisfied, from all he heard in the family, of the ardent desire of Lord and Lady Heriford that their son should settle in life, he could not but perceive that it was for his advantage to have so near a connection of his own established as the future marchioness.

Hence the letter, which, without breathing a syllable on the subject in the De Capell family, he despatched to Maria. Hence, the tearful joy—a joy, however, in which abided a deeper pang than tears could express,—with which she commenced her preparations for accompanying her uncle and aunt. Maria and Miss Maitland, with the three sisters of the bride, and the young daughter of one of their Cumbrian neighbours, were to officiate as the six bridesmaids of Lady Alicia Barrington.

When first that name reached the ear of Maria, a cold shudder passed through her frame. To *her* it appeared the precursor of so many evils! Notwithstanding the triumphant attitude of her uncle, notwithstanding even the conviction of the better-affectioned Mrs. Barrington, that Charles was accomplishing a most auspicious union, Maria dared not believe that he would be happy.

She had better hope for him, indeed, with Lady Alicia, than with the *débutante*. For Eleanor was vain as well as proud; and Charles might have found other rivals in *her* affection than the love of worldly distinction, which she feared would, at some future time, put his wife out of conceit with the lot she had chosen. But still, she could not but fancy him wanting a tenderer, a more considerate, a more deferential partner in life, than he was likely to find in Lady Heriford's daughter. *Who* knew better than *she* did the *exigence* of Charles;—the waiting upon that he required,—the passive obedience he exacted?

When, at the end of their second day's journey, the Easton party drew near the castle, and Maria began to tremble at the little probability there was of her cousin being satisfied with the figure cut by his homely family among such a host of great people,—a still deeper degree of emotion arose from her dread of seeing him in company with one who was about to swear at the altar to be his, but who would, perhaps, swear it with repugnance!

To what might be awaiting herself at the castle she gave not a thought. She had nothing more in this world to hope or fear. On visiting Greensells, a feeling of jealousy of the Eleanor so much vaunted by her cousin, and the dread of being converted by *her* into an object of raillery, had created some uneasiness in her mind. But she experienced no jealous feeling of the woman with whom he was about to form an interested marriage. Towards Lady Alicia, she felt rather a sentiment of pity.

It was only Mrs. Barrington who looked forward anxiously to the meeting between her niece and Lord Clandon. Having no clue to the cause of his abrupt departure from Greensells, and attributing it to a somewhat tardy fear of being committed further than was warranted by prudence in his attentions to Maria, she was afraid the poor girl might feel mortified by the alteration she was likely to find in his deportment towards her.

It was dusk when they reached the Castle. Charles had so issued his instructions for their journey, as to secure the quizzical old family chariot from being exposed to the ridicule of more than the servants' hall. Aware of the moment of their coming, he took care to be in waiting in the room where Lady Heriford received her guests before dinner; that he might himself conduct them to their own, and inaugurate them into the ways of the house. But on stepping forward, on the announcement of their names, to lead his mother to the marchioness, he found he had been forestalled. Lord Clandon, who had been loitering on the road, to catch the first glimpse of their carriage, had galloped back to the Castle in time to hand them from it, and gave his arm to Mrs. Barrington across the hall.

Lady Alicia, who, at grandmamma's suggestion, was awaiting alone with the marchioness the arrival of her future mother-in-law, by whom she was greeted with an affectionate kiss of congratulation, felt grateful to her brother for an attention, doubtless intended to enhance in the eyes of the household the consequence of the family with which she was about to ally herself, and whose homeliness she excused by saying, "No matter! Charles has nothing in common with them; and, after the marriage, as

they luckily live in the country, I need scarcely ever see them again."

But she could not interpret into a compliment to herself the splendid bouquet of hot-house flowers she found lying on Miss Brenton's dressing-table, on accompanying her to her room.

"Doubtless, a little gallantry of your cousin's!" said she, with a slight flush of surprise, on hearing Maria's admiring exclamations.

But Miss Brenton involuntarily shook her head. "Lord Clandon," said she, "told me he had sent some flowers to my room."

But, if a little piqued by her first suspicion, Lady Alicia was now far more surprised. *Clandon* send flowers to a young lady! Her grave, shy, listless brother, aware that there so much as existed a conservatory at the Castle, or that bouquets were an acceptable gift! She could not have felt more startled, had one of the marble statues in the hall walked off its pedestal, and up the grand staircase, with a similar offering in its hand.

A feeling of satisfaction soon succeeded to that of amazement. If her brother really admired this pretty, humble, gentle cousin of her future husband,—if his remaining at Greensells after the departure of the family, which had been so great a puzzle to them all, had arisen from attachment to Maria,—what a mortification for Eleanor Maitland! And towards Eleanor, ever since her engagements with Charles Barrington, she had experienced the sort of animosity which people of the world are apt to cherish against those they have injured.

No open demonstrations of ill-will had occurred between them. On the contrary, they were more civil to each other than ever. Lady Alicia had personally requested Miss Maitland to be her bridesmaid; and Miss Maitland had expressed a hope that Lady Alicia and her bridegroom would pay them an early visit at Wolsey Hall. But no opportunity was neglected by either of saying things which they knew would be vexatious. When the *trousseau* of the bride arrived from town, and was exhibited to the admiration of the party in the house, the remarks, ostensibly laud-

atory of the lovely *débutante*, were such as to place so strongly in relief the want of attraction of her for whom those elegant and becoming dresses were intended, that a tingling blush of indignation suffused her sallow cheek.

“Do you remember accusing me one day, in Kensington Gardens, just before we left town for the season,” whispered Eleanor to her whom she called her friend, “of encouraging Mr. Barrington, as a *pis aller*, only lest I should go through the year without a chance of orange blossoms and a point veil? Am I not very generous not to return the compliment *now*?”

And though Lady Alicia, whose genius for a cutting retort was sufficiently remarkable to afford a somewhat alarming prospect to her future husband, prudently abstained from rejoinder, it was only from apprehension lest some of the sarcasms she had formerly launched at the handsome young *hobereau* and his family should be brought forward in retaliation.

But to render Maria her instrument of vengeance, was a tempting opportunity. Lady Alicia had not forgotten the sensation produced at Greensells by the unsullied and modest graces of one who seemed only ashamed of the attention she attracted; and the party now assembled at the Castle was so familiar with the charms of the fair Eleanor, that a new face, even if less lovely, would be more acceptable. When Maria, therefore, simply but freshly dressed, and with the youthfulness of air and complexion peculiar to those who have never been exposed to the glare and withering atmosphere of over-heated rooms, entered the saloon, leaning upon her arm and holding Lord Clandon's *cadeau* in her hand, the effect produced more than equalled her expectations.

Lord Mortayne instantly inquired of Miss Maitland, beside whom, as usual, he was seated, the name of that charming Hamadryad; and on learning that she was “only a country cousin of Mr. Barrington,” assigned her that of *Fleur des Champs*; while old Vassall, after fixing upon her face the eye-glass which affected to assign to near-sightedness the natural blindness of his years, declared her to be the image of poor dear Lady Andalusia Murdoch.

“To whom you were paying attention, I remember,”

added Lady Kilsythe, to whom he addressed himself, "at Paris, after the Peace of Amiens."

And when he entreated grandmamma to be careful of compromising the reputation of a woman for whom he still entertained the highest regard,—“Who would imagine,” cried the unrelenting dowager, “that you were talking of one who, twenty years ago, died without a tooth in her head?”

Luckily for Maria, whose emotion at meeting her cousin under circumstances so exciting was increased by the fatigues of her journey, the party assembled was too large to admit of her feeling the object of general attention. The festivities preparatory to the wedding had already commenced. Several of the leading families of the county were staying in the house; and many others, from the immediate neighbourhood, were added to the dinner-party.

After coffee, the band of Lord Heriford's yeomanry, which was stationed in the gallery, struck up an animated strain; and a good band, in a splendid chamber, naturally suggested the idea of dancing. The daughters of the country neighbours, to many of whom, in so remote a county, the London season was a mere name and a ball a vision of bliss never to be gratified, began to agitate themselves with the hope of an unexpected pleasure.

But the divinities of the temple were not propitious. The gentlemen of the party were not of an order to martyrise themselves for the delight of country neighbours. Lord Henry de Capell would have condescended, but from the dread of being quizzed by Sir Wolseley; who, according to his engagements, had returned that afternoon. But Charles Barrington was devoting himself to his lady-love, and Lord Mortayne sitting aloof with the fair Eleanor,

The world forgetting, by the world forgot.

Even when Lady Mary and Lady Blanche, with two slim Honourables who could venture to call their soles their own, dashed into a *valse*, no one followed. The Cumbrian damsels were unable to keep pace with the fashionable *valseurs*, whose rate of speed might distance a high-mettled racer; and they consequently stood round, looking con-

fused and out of place, while the gay strains of the *Fusées Volantes* enlivened the gallery.

"Hey-day! I thought there was dancing here?" cried old Lady Kilsythe, who, on hearing the music, gladly deserted the saloon and its whist-tables (where the Marquis, the elder Barringtons, and a variety of other grave personages were assembled), in hopes of seeing the young people of the party happy and merry. But when Charles Barrington, on whose arm she was leaning while her daughter and eldest grand-daughters followed in procession, pointed out the panting forms of Lady Mary and her sister, and their partners, "Pho, pho!" cried the old lady with indignation, "you don't call *that* dancing, I hope? Give me a good hearty old English country dance, of as many couples as the party is made of; where all have their turn, without showing off for the amusement of the rest."

A proposition made by "grandmamma," nobody in that house ventured to gainsay; and the merry tune of "I'll gang nae mair to yon town" soon set every one in motion. Old and young appeared to admit that a wedding party was a plea for any amount of extravagance or derogation.

"My dear mother, you have wrought a miracle!" said Lady Heriford, ensconcing the dowager in a comfortable *bergère* at the head of the gallery, along which a set was forming, to the head of which Lord Clandon,—yes, actually Lord Clandon,—was leading "Fleur des Champs," awkwardly drawing on his gloves as he drew her along. "This is the first time I ever saw Clandon dance, except at our tenants' balls."

"And a charming partner he has chosen!" rejoined the old lady, with an approving nod. "No nonsense about her—no fallals—nothing but what nature gave her; worth a thousand, in my opinion, of the Frenchified doll sitting out yonder with Lord Mortayne; as if an old-young man like that, whose Cupid ought to be clad in fleecy hosiery, can have anything to say to a young girl that ought to put her out of conceit with the pastimes suitable to her teens!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Before thee stands this fair Hesperides,
With golden fruit, but dangerous to be touch'd,
For death-like dragons here affright thee hard.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE venerable dowager might discern no grounds for sympathy between the languid Eastern pilgrim and the girlish Eleanor; but her views were evidently not shared by the parties themselves. On every syllable uttered by Lord Mortayne, the attention of the *débutante* was riveted, even to infatuation. When Lord Henry de Capell, one of her favourite London partners, approached to ask her hand for the *valse* which, by way of compensation to themselves, his sisters proposed after the annoyance of the English country-dance, she raised her blue eyes towards him with a look of as well-dissembled wonder at the proposition, as though she had never danced in her life; and, after a scarcely civil dismissal, calmly resumed the whispered conversation, apparently so much more to her taste.

Most of the party present were too fully occupied with their own pleasures or interests to take heed of the happy couple which had paired off into one of the recesses. Two persons there were, however, whose attention was not blinded to their proceedings. Old Vassall, who, in the course of the last fifteen years, had witnessed the whisperings of Lord Mortayne, in divers recesses, in scores of different country-houses or London opera-boxes, could not help marvelling how he found patience to play out his part of excellent dissembling;—like Charles Kemble, the edge of whose stage tenderness must have been so blunted by having, in the course of his experience, to rescue some hundreds of successive Juliets out of the tomb of all the Capulets. Aware that even his own patent ventilating peruke and mineral teeth required frequent renewing, the venerable beau pondered in his mind whether Morty read up for his character of a universal lover; and whether, at the commencement of a season, he laid in a fresh store of the last new phrases from the French novels in fashion.

It was clear, at all events, that no eloquence was wanting for the pleading of his passion. With such earnest fluency did he address her, and so fascinated was the attention of Eleanor by his expressions, that the other individual, who from afar was gravely regarding them, could not resist a mournful wave of the head, as she sat, unnoticed, behind the capacious *bergère* of grandmamma. For, with those whispers, those looks, those deceptive words, Lady Sophia was familiar! She, too, had hung entranced upon the accents of one who was more dangerous than a wanton deceiver. Himself the dupe of the sentiments of the moment, she knew that, on recovering from his illusions, there was no pity in his heart for those by whom they had been created,—those by whom they had been shared,—those who had suffered them to expire.

Unable to estimate the power of such youthful beauty as Eleanor's, upon what are called the "feelings" of an egotist of the day, she regarded her rival only as another victim to be added to the list of those who had been loved by Mortayne, and by Mortayne been abandoned.

"*She* will not feel it so much," mused the now grave young woman; "for, after all, he is only making her the victim of one of the same unmeaning flirtations in which she indulged with Mr. Barrington, to a degree that misled us all, if it did not mislead *him*. Still, I wish this house had not been chosen for the renewal of follies, for which I trusted he had survived the inclination."

That she might not dwell with bitterness upon the subject, Lady Sophia tried to divert her attention to the far pleasanter spectacle of her brother, Lord Clandon, exhibiting, with uncouth good-will, to Miss Brenton, the lions of Heriford Castle; pointing out the choicest pictures, the most graceful statues, the most curious antiques, and relating the various historical legends which rendered the site of the old donjon classic ground.

She could imagine, by his animated features, all that he was saying. In *his* address, there was no pretence at mystery, no whispered insinuations, no significant glances, no drawing aside from the rest of the party. All was honest, true, and decided. He had no objection that those present should hear, see, and understand what he was about. He

would not have cared, even had he suspected how many of them were commenting upon his altered deportment, and citing it as one of the greatest miracles of Cupid, while admitting, with one accord, that he was no longer the same man.

More than one of the party could hardly refrain from going up to the lovely, modest-looking girl upon his arm, and congratulating her on the wonders she had wrought, and the happy prospects awaiting her as Countess of Clandon; for it was as naturally set down that she would *accept* the offers made her, as that the offers were in process of being made.

But if the rough address of Lord Clandon had disappeared, the good sense and good feeling which had so long laid concealed beneath were wholly unchanged. The utmost extent of his present views was to render the sojourn of his father's house agreeable to her who had welcomed him so kindly to fare less costly; and to avert her attention from the cousin, in whom he sorrowingly believed her feelings to be bound up. His kindly heart having once suggested that painful emotions must be struggling in her bosom, he was simply trying to aid her in overcoming them, with the thoughtful attention of a friend.

Not but that he looked forward to a time when friendship would probably ripen into warmer feelings. She could not *persist* in wasting her sensibilities on a being like Charles Barrington; she would not so belie the purity of her nature as to doat upon the husband of another. *His* turn would come. When she recalled hereafter to mind by whom her vexations had been comforted, and by whom her position thoroughly understood, she would turn towards him with gratitude certain to progress into an affection as heartfelt as he believed indispensable to the happiness of married life.

But to secure the accomplishment of these hopes, he said not a word calculated to alarm or put her on her guard. He adverted not, even remotely, to his passionate attachment. He was too wise to injure the perfection of the flower he was cultivating, by prematurely pulling open the bud.

"I say, old boy!" cried Lord Newbury, dragging away Lord Henry de Capell from the side of Lady Barbara

Bernardo, with whom he was pretending to laugh over the burlesque drolleries of Monsieur Cryptogame, in order that Meshech might not perceive he was laughed at—"by Jove, it's all up with your chance of strawberry-leaves! There's the Clan going it towards a proposal, at the rate of nine knots an hour! Better secure the flaxen-headed heiress, and her golden booty, before your downfall is blown."

"I wish I could secure your not making an ass of yourself for any ten minutes of the day!" was the peevish rejoinder of his particular friend,—endeavouring to stave him off. "Old Vassall, who is watching us, and too deaf to hear what you say, will fancy you are picking a quarrel with me by treading on my toes."

"Never mind Old Vassall. Nobody has listened to a word uttered by the old beau since the close of the eighteenth century. Much better attend to Clan's courtship!"

"Not I,—I can afford, thank Heaven, to indulge in the luxury of a married elder brother," retorted Lord Henry. "And what should I lose by his marriage? *His* life is twice as good as mine."

"Why, to be sure, Clan has not been driving nails into his coffin ever since he was out of his cradle!" rejoined Newbury. "I don't suppose, Henry, the insurance offices would fall in love with you at first sight. You wouldn't raise anything of a *very* long figure even on the Kilsythe reversion."

"I don't know," rejoined the future peer; "my uncle is not only three times my age, but runs the risk of being Molly Maguire every year, by a visit to his Irish estates!"

"More arguments for securing the flaxen-headed heiress!" persisted Newbury.

"Marry Eleanor Maitland? By Jove, I would as soon give my hand to Herodias's daughter!" cried Lord Henry, after following the direction of his companion's glance towards the recess, where Eleanor sat with eyes upturned towards the face of Mortayne, apparently resigning her whole mind to his influence. "There would have been some excuse for her throwing over Barrington for Clan; because, though Charley's a deuced good-looking fellow, Clan is sterling gold. But yonder rag of a *roué*,—yonder withered Lovelace,—yonder old memorandum-hook of other women's

follies, is a villanous exchange. Mortayne reminds me of the scenes of a theatre, wretched things, that can't stand being looked at by daylight, but which turu into fairy palaces and Italian landscapes, when lighted up with gas and red flame."

Nevertheless, the light which at that moment brightened the fine features, at too great a distance from Lord Heury to be distinctly seen, was decidedly the *feu sacré!* It was love, real love, such as neither Henry de Capell, nor Newbury, nor any other of the shallow boys of the day, were susceptible of entertaining:—love, such as lends the enchantment of its bewildering dreams to every scene it looks on, and projects around the form of the beloved object an atmosphere of glory. Never, in his brighter youth, had Mortayne beheld a face so bewitching to his faucy, as the one on which he was now gazing. Never had he listened to words so soothing, as those which, when he described the philosophical retirement into which he was desirous, henceforward, to retreat from the noisier follies of life, replied, that "happy were those by whom his retirement would be shared!"

Though Lord Newbury, with his usual genius for the *mal-à-propos*, broke in upon their *tête-à-tête* with entreaties that Miss Maitland would not deprive herself of the delicious spectacle of "Lubin Log's proposals to Charley Barrington's country cousin," no sooner had they got rid of him, than she renewed, with as much steadiness as before, her declaration that a single season in London had convinced her of the taskwork wearisomeness of a life of fashion.

Whether the affirmation prospered or no, may be surmised from the fact that, the following morning, after breakfast, Sir Wolseley was invited to his sister's dressing-room, (as if in return for the similar compliment he had paid her a fortnight before); and, as it happened that the following day was to witness the first meet of the hounds for the season, and he was engaged with Lord Clandon, and his friend Henry and Newbury, at the keuel, the amiable brother entered the room with even something less than his usual kindness and courtesy.

"What do you want with me, Nell?" cried he, abruptly.
 "Why send boring me with a message, when you kued I had

an appointment at the stables? Make haste, however, for they promised to stay till I came back."

"In that case, I will defer what I have to say till another time," was his sister's cold reply. And her voice and manner were so altered, and, on looking steadily into her face, her brother saw there such decided traces of a sleepless night, that, instead of again addressing her, he walked to the dressing-room door, and calling to a page whom he had noticed catching flies in a window of the corridor as he came along, bad him hasten to the gentlemen at the kennel, and tell them they were not to wait for him.

"And *now*, what have you to tell me?" said he, more humanely, having re-entered the room, and taken a place on the *chaise longue* beside his sister's writing table. "You seem out of spirits, Nell. Is any thing the matter?"

"Nothing but what you will be very glad to hear!" she replied, mastering a slight emotion, caused by his unusual tone of kindness. "I am going to be married."

"Married? You? Nonsense! You are hoaxing me! Who on earth is there here for you to marry?—Barrington's booked. Clandon, *all but*; and Newbury and Henry think too much as I do about matrimony, for any chance of *their* braving the noose!"

"I have accepted the hand of Lord Mortayne."

"Morty? Pho, pho! Why not say Old Vassall, at once! One is quite as likely as t'other!"

"And what is there to make you so incredulous?" inquired Eleanor, piqued by his tone of levity, when she had expected only congratulations.

"In the first place, that Morty, who knows the world so well, would never be mad enough to ask you; in the next, that if he did, you would never be mad enough to say—'Yes!'"

"I *have*, however, been what you term 'mad enough' to to accept him," rejoined Miss Maitland, "and was desirous, my dear Wolseley, that you should be the first person apprised of my choice."

"You are *really* in earnest, then, Nell?" rejoined her brother, in the tone of a person suddenly sobered by immersion in cold water. "At nineteen—young, pretty, rich,

and your own mistress—you are going to throw yourself away on an infirm, hypped, half-ruined old rake.”

“When you attain Lord Mortayne’s age, you will be, probably, somewhat surprised at hearing it called decrepitude!” rejoined his sister, with some indignation.

“But *I* have not led, and am not going to lead, the life by which he has broken his health and fortunes! Opera dancers and dice will never send *me* to the dogs!”

A deep flush rose on the cheeks of Eleanor—perhaps for her brother’s coarseness, perhaps for her lover’s vices. But conviction having gained upon the mind of Sir Wolseley, his irritation was too great to admit of niceness in his choice of epithets. Abruptly pushing back the sofa-table, he rose from his seat and began to pace the room; absorbed in reflections apparently so unsatisfactory, that his sister judged it advisable to soothe him, by conciliation, to a more auspicious mood.

“You will admit, my dear Wolseley,” said she, “that my fortune is sufficiently large to enable me, more than most girls, to dispense with an interested match. Placing Lord Mortayne’s affairs at their worst, we shall have more than four thousand a year.”

“Which is wealth to many men, but to *him* beggary!”—interrupted her brother, already a little pacified.

“To his rank in life you can make no objections. It is higher than I had a right to expect.”

“I don’t know why! For the last three hundred years our family has been matching with the nobility; and though my mother took care to affix a blot to our escutcheon, it is not the greatest people who have a right to cavil at it.”

“As regards his manners and appearance—” Eleanor was beginning, in order to silence all further allusion to her mother.

“Don’t talk to me about his manners and appearance—talk to me about his *conduct!*” interrupted her brother.

“As regards his *conduct*, then, resumed Eleanor, undismayed, “it cannot have been *very* objectionable, or he would scarcely hold the distinguished place assigned him in the world; and I defy you to prove that Lord Mortayne was ever charged with a dishonourable action.”

“Dishonourable!—For being dishonourable, a man is *cut*!—For being dishonourable, a man is *shot*!—so that few who value their lives or pleasures are caught tripping. But do you suppose that a pair of clean hands, in money matters, will suffice for the happiness of married life? In other respects Mortayne’s proceedings have been uniformly unprincipled. As a member of society—as a man of the world—it is nothing to *me*. He is at liberty to make love to any man’s wife, or any man’s daughter, for aught I care. But the moment he pretends to be my brother-in-law, I have a right to say that, for the last fifteen years, Mortayne has always had some love-affair or other on hand, to sneak out of as best he might.”

“Which does not tend to prove that, married to a woman to whom he is seriously attached, he may not make a good husband.”

“My dear Nelly, to all these women in their turn, he has been ‘*seriously* attached.’ Nay, I should not be surprised if he had often tried with all his might and main to be faithful. But it isn’t *in* him. He is naturally *inconstant*—a whirligig—a weathercock! You refused Fred. Ashly, without a second thought, because there was madness in the family.—I am not sure but fickleness is the worst disease of the two!”

“Just now, you spoke of Lord Mortayne as in the decline of life; and now you want to persuade me that he is a wild seducer!” pettishly rejoined Miss Maitland. “You should adhere to one line of accusation. But, as I assure you, I never had the pretension of marrying a pair of lawn sleeves——”

“Lawn sleeves, indeed! You don’t know what you are talking about,” cried Sir Wolseley with rekindled ire. “A girl of your age and habits of life cannot comprehend what she marries in an old *roué*—a *roué*, too, like Mortayne, who, in addition to his London experience, has run through all the orgies of the Continent and all the licentiousness of the East. It is loathsome to think of, Nell—when one looks in a young face like yours, on which the open sun has yet hardly shone.”

“I never knew you so considerate about me before,”—rejoined his sister, but not as if his consideration were acceptable.

“Because, till now, I never saw you in danger. Marriage is a serious thing, sister. Our family has especial reason to feel that—but I will say nothing on that grievous head, just now,” said he, interrupting himself. “I don’t deny that I want to see you settled—I don’t deny that I may have told you so, more plainly than, perhaps, you thought pleasant. But it was because my own observations, in the season, had disgusted me with the ways of London girls; who would rather go flirting on, year after year, with the expectation of making a better match, than accept some prudent settlement.”

“You told me, in the most decided terms, before I went to town last spring,” said Eleanor, in a positive tone, “that I must marry before the year was out——”

“Or content yourself with a country life. Remember *that!*—And was there anything very dreadful in the alternative?—I abhor London. The life led by men like Mortayne is not to my taste; and I made up my mind, at my father’s death, that I was not bound to drag you about, season after season, growing ugly, sick, and peevish, to the sacrifice of the whole comfort of my life. However, Nell, even that determination I regret and repent. I am sorry I ever said a word that was likely to hurry you in your choice; and beg you will dismiss it from your mind. Sooner than you should marry a man with whom I’m sure you won’t be happy, I will buy a house in town—if that be what you want.”

“I assure you I am quite as ill-inclined towards London as yourself,” replied Eleanor, a little moved.

“At Wolseley, then,—if there is anything in the ways of the place disagreeable to you, change them, and I’ll never interfere!—You are not particularly fond of Esher or Alan Hurkesley. You are, perhaps, annoyed at the prospect of the visit they are to pay me——”

“No, indeed, I knew nothing about the matter.”

“I was going to say, that I would write and put them off this very morning, if the thought of their coming annoyed you. But don’t, I beg and entreat, allow yourself to make a missish match.—Don’t be persuaded into doing, in haste, what you’ll be sure to repent at leisure!”

There was a degree of warm sincerity in all this, so differ-

ent from anything she had been prepared to expect from her selfish, savage brother, that the *débutante*, under her armour of worldliness, experienced something almost amounting to a thrill. She answered him, however, with a degree of *à plomb* that would have done honour to Lady Alicia de Capell. For, in the interval, her eyes had fallen upon a small ruby ring that sparkled upon her finger, a first pledge of love from Lord Mortayne, which brought back all the pride of conquest into her heart.

The fond attachment of one whom so many had vainly sought to enslave—the fond attachment of one whose enslavement would produce such a sensation in the fashionable world—was a sufficient weight, when thrown into the opposite scale, to invalidate all her brother had been saying.

“My dear Wolseley, believe me, I feel as I ought the kindness which so completely misleads you,” said she. “But be assured you may give me to Lord Mortayne without the smallest scruple of conscience. On my side, as on his, it is a marriage of inclination. I am acquainted, as you know, with all that is best of London society. The young men of the day have most of them passed me in review, without making the smallest impression. To Mortayne, on the contrary, I look up with affection. His society is agreeable to me. I am never tired of hearing *him* talk, as so often of your young friends.”

“In short, you have made up your mind to be the Right Honourable Lady Mortayne!”

“I have!” replied Eleonor, firmly, as though to write *finis* to the chapter.

“In that case, I have not another word to say,” rejoined her brother. “Woman’s will is a thing I trust I am too wise to contend against! And when, pray, is the match to take place?”

“As soon as you can make it convenient to complete arrangements with Mortayne’s lawyer.”

“It is quite convenient. All *that* part of the business, Eleonor, will be easily accomplished.”

“And no other obstacles *can* or *will* arise,” added Miss Maitland, in a tone that conveyed to him, as she intimated, the strength of her resolution.

“Mortayne has been staying here, like ourselves, I fancy,

for this accursed wedding of Lady Alicia's," rejoined her brother, "and on Monday next the party breaks up. Is it your wish that he should accompany us back to Wolsey Hall?"

"By no means. He has arrangements to make in his own house,—a house to which he had almost given up the idea of ever assigning a mistress. However, it would be but flattering that you made the invitation."

"I don't want to flatter him, Nell. I must give him my sister, because she chooses it. But I give you notice I shall do it with an ill grace."

"You do not mean that you purpose any ungraciousness towards one whom all the world——"

"Set your mind at ease!" interrupted her brother with some *hauteur*. "I am not a peer of the realm. But, for my own sake, I shall behave like a gentleman."

Another moment, and his hand was on the handle of the door, though, sooth to say, he had lost all interest about the hunting-stables.

"I suppose," said he, turning to address his sister as he was quitting the room, "this match of yours is, for the present, to be kept a secret?"

"By no means," replied Eleanor, with a wholly unembarrassed countenance. "Such things are a nine days' wonder; and the sooner the first day of the nine is over, the better."

A slight shrug of the shoulders escaped him as he left the room. "All alike!" muttered he. "The only delicacy they possess, lies in their complexions,—the only warmth, in their temper!"

Even Lord Mortayne, overjoyed as he was at his prospects, had almost appeared to suggest that, for a time, it would be better to enjoy them unenvied. Perhaps he experienced a sort of compunction at the idea of having his marriage *declared* under that roof. But the moment Eleanor expressed her desire to have it known that she had pledged herself to be his for ever, the tumult of his heart overpowered every feeling of reluctance.

The announcement did not, however, produce *all* the sensation anticipated by the *débutante*. For two days past, the match had been looked upon, by every one but her

brother, as a settled thing:—the unfriendly, deciding that *she* was tempted by a coronet, and *he* by fifty thousand pounds; the friendly, that dividing between them so many worldly and natural advantages, they had every prospect of being happy. But the majority of the lookers-on, who were indifferent to both parties, found far more to talk about in the beauty of the Oriental pearls and India muslins (gifts to herself from Madras), which Mrs. Barrington had presented to her daughter-in-law; and experienced twice the curiosity concerning the crisis of Lord Clandon's wooing.

More than one guest in the house had noticed a whispered communication, addressed to Miss Brenton by his lordship when they met in the luncheon-room, to which, though pale and dispirited, Maria had been heard to reply by an exclamation of unqualified amazement.—What could all this mean?

Alas! it foreboded nothing likely to forward the projects of Lord Heriford for the perpetuation of his noble dynasty! Clan had simply acquainted his young friend, that the young lady who had formerly inspired her with such undue interest, was about to become a wedded wife.

"The wife of your brother?" said she—having often heard among the De Capell girls laughing allusions to her being intended for Henry.

"No,—of the gentleman with whom you saw her talking last night in the gallery."

"That *old man*! Surely he cannot be much younger than my uncle?"

"He is fifteen years older than *she* is. But in *his* case, years are nothing:—it is the famous Lord Mortayne."

"Mortayne?—I do not think I ever heard the name before," said Maria, as if ashamed, and trying to remember.

And the smile of satisfaction that overspread the countenance of Lord Clandon while listening to her *naïve* observations, probably arose from the comfortable conviction that to her, in whom he trusted he beheld the partner of his future life, even the names of such people as "Morty" were a mystery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Oh ! 'tis too much !

I never dreamt of this. I idly thought
The true devotion of so many years
Gave me a right undoubted on your heart.
In its own strength my love was confident,
And feared no rival.—WILLIAM HARNES.

WHATEVER the results of the division on Lord Mortayne's matrimonial motion, the purpose of the seconder was accomplished. Lady Alicia, on the eve of her marriage, was thoroughly discomposed. After so bitter a tug of war, the *débutante* had triumphed ! If Eleanor had been unable to witness the defection of the man whom she had been jeered by her rival into believing her inferior in birth and fortune, without the pang that ever attends the infidelity of the first admirer whose professions of love have been listened to with less than indifference,—if she had watched, with anguish of spirit, the gradual enchainment of her former slave to the feet of one by whom his homage was prospered by unvarying graciousness,—she had now her ample revenge. The bridegroom's cheek was blanched either by jealousy or rage ; and the future Lady Alicia Barrington forced to strike her flag to the future Lady Mortayne.

None knew better than Lady Heriford's daughter the spell comprehended in the magic of a name. The wife of "Morty" must have been popular, even if plain as herself, or as vulgar as Miss Vicary Arable. But, when young, fair, and wealthy as Eleanor, the throne of London fashion would be her own !

But this was not the worst. The announcement of Lord Mortayne's engagement having brought about certain explanations with grandmamma, hitherto carefully withheld, the old lady, enlightened by her grandson Clandon as to the heroism, and, still more, the womanly grace with which his sister Sophia had submitted to one of the worst

trials that befall the female heart, actually begged her of her mother.

“From what I have seen lately of the sayings and doings of this house, my dear Susan,” said she, “I am inclined to think the habits of *mine* better suited to Sophy. I am growing old, my dear. My hours, though never dull, are sometimes lonesome; and, if I have abstained, heretofore, from begging the company of one of my grandchildren, it was from a conviction, strong in my mind, that nature intended only people of succeeding generations to abide together. Twenty or thirty years’ difference of age and tastes is quite as much as can be made compatible. But Sophy has been careworn into premature womanhood, and will, may be, be happier in my sleepy dovecote at Warleigh, with her books and flowers, than amid the racket of balls and pother of flirtations kept up by her younger brothers and sisters.”

Lady Heriford, who often regarded poor Sophia’s grave face as a reproach, allowed herself to be easily convinced. The plan suited her; for her venerable mother was growing too old to be left alone with servants. Nor was Sophia less pleased. It would be a relief to lose sight of the gay world at the moment it was ringing with acclamations on the auspicious marriage of Lord Mortayne; acclamations amid which her own harmless name would probably be repeated in a tone of disparagement by the lips of many.

Lady Alicia alone was dissentient. For grandmamma to desire her sister for an inmate, seemed almost to amount to a selection as her heir; and Alicia (who, as the eldest born, was her god-daughter) had long looked forward to monopolizing Warleigh and the fifty thousand pounds. Lady Kilsythe’s recent generosity, indeed, seemed to confirm her expectations; and it was truly annoying, after having exhorted her future husband to be “scrupulously attentive to grandmamma, whose property she was likely to inherit,” that the same unexpected stroke which converted the *débutante* into a peeress, and deprived her sister of the object of her youthful love, should prove equally fatal to her covetous expectations.

When, therefore, the *Morning Post*, in describing the

“HYMENEALS AT HERIFORD CASTLE,” in its largest type, and with a degree of efflorescence well calculated to—

Yield its muse just half-a-crown per line,

adverted, in due precedence after the point-lace veil and orange-flowers,—the six lovely bridesmaids, all arrayed in the same elegant costume of white muslin over pink silk,—and the school-children of the village strewing flowers before “the happy pair,” to the “slight cloud overshadowing, during the ceremony, the forehead of the noble bride; doubtless in anticipation of her approaching separation from her beloved family, and the home of her childhood,”—it showed itself clearer-sighted than in the usual manifestoes of its great letters. A cloud did indeed overshadow her brow. Even while giving her hand to one who, albeit his personal attractions were such as to induce a suspicion that he might be a *Cupidon déchaîné*, was qualified by coolness, both of heart and head, to ascend, hand in hand with her, the slippery ways of preferment in which her intriguing nature discerned the happiness of life,—even when receiving the congratulations of that brilliant assemblage, and listening to the somewhat lengthy adieus of the old marquis, previous to entering the handsome chariot, her bridal gift from her brother Clandon,—even *then* she felt herself outwitted!

The great event, however, was over and ended; and, in the course of the following day or two, poor old Lord Heriford became too experienced in parting compliments, not to learn the valuable art of abbreviation. The party broke up as rapidly as the crowd after an execution; and the paragraph of the *Morning Post*, like the last dying speech and confession cried in the streets, was all that remained to the public of the recent excitement.

Had grandmamma but paused in her kindly intentions towards Lady Sophia, she might perhaps have judged it an act of charity to extend her invitation to that “poor giddy thing, Lady Mary.” For it was hinted in the Castle, that Sir Wolseley Maitland, on the eve of his departure, so far from confirming her flighty hopes of an offer of his hand, had said before them all to Lord Henry, “You and Newbury, old fellow, must come and finish the shooting season

with me at Wolseley, as soon as Nell's match has come off. Esher will be with me, and several other capital fellows, who were not quite the thing so long as there was a young lady in the house. But it is going to be Bachelors' Hall now! No fear of *my* making an ass of myself! No fear of petticoat government at Wolseley Hall!"

Not daring to provoke the justice-dealing strictures of her mother, by admitting how much of her kindness towards "her charming young relative, Miss Maitland," had been produced by the hope of converting this uncompromising woman-hater into a son-in-law, Lady Heriford affected to treat the affair, when reported to her, as an excellent joke. Even Lady Mary was too much addicted to giggling, and had heard too many family reproaches vented upon Sophia's sorrowful face, not to be disposed to take the affront offered her, as if Cub Castle and its master had never been her object; nor, at nineteen, could so merry a nature perceive the smallest necessity for taking the veil, because a bridal one was not forthcoming.

Of those, meanwhile, to whose departing equipages the grey-haired porter touched his hat, as they issued from the castle gates on the day succeeding the wedding, the one whose heartache was deepest seated, was Maria. The pique of the *débutante*, the vexation of Lady Alicia, the sorrow of Sophia at leaving the home where she had once been happy, were sensations, rather than sentiments. But the trouble of the poor orphan who had lost the pole-star by whose remote light her dreary days were cheered, was almost too heavy for endurance.

The bitter uncle, whose grumblings during that two days' journey afforded a sad foretaste of what he would be on returning home to find his wood-stack diminished, and his very small-beer drunk out, would perhaps be unpropitious to Mrs. Barrington's entreaty that his niece's removal to Cornbury Hall might be deferred for a time. Even if he consented to harbour her, what would there be *now* to reconcile her to his constant reproofs? What would even Easton appear, when there was no longer the chance of a break in its ever-clouded atmosphere,—no half-yearly vacation to bring back her cousin Charles,—nobody to work for,—nobody to slave for,—for the chance of having it said,

“Is it you, Maria, who have had my room so neatly got up?”—or, “By Jove, coz, there are nearly as many flowers in your garden as at the Horticultural.”

For Charles had confided to her, soon after her arrival at Heriford, in the glow of intimacy produced by the expectation of soon hailing her as a countess, that, with his own consent, he would never set foot in Easton again.

“Between my father’s shabby ways, the wretchedness of the house, and the cursed vulgarity of the country neighbours,” said he, “Lady Alicia would be driven to distraction. We often laugh, together, over that frightful luncheon scene! But it would not do to repeat the joke.”

Luckily, no necessity existed for the immediate intimation of his unfilial intentions. The happy couple were going abroad. Like most English girls reared in the monotonous seesaw of four months of the year at papa’s town house, and eight months at his country seat, Lady Alicia had formed romantic notions of the pleasures of the Continent. Her husband’s previous project of spending the winter in Paris, was, consequently, not abandoned; and the number of the *Morning Post*, succeeding that which announced her to be a wedded wife, superadded the fact of her embarkation for France.

Sad, sad was the afternoon at Easton that followed the receipt of the farewell letter, bearing the Dover postmark! The exultation produced by the pomp and circumstance of the wedding at an end, Mr. Barrington had fallen back at once into the meanness and peevishness of his usual habits. Little as he had been called upon to produce on occasion of the brilliant match effected by his son, it was enough to unhinge the sordid economy of his system of life. For the outlay of presents, travelling, and dress, his strong box had of necessity been unlocked; and, so far from his customary accumulation at the end of the year, a considerable deficit was imminent! There was every pretext, therefore, for announcing himself twenty times a day to be a ruined man;—for shaving still closer the scanty rations of his establishment;—and for complaining of the heartless profligacy with which Charles had endeavoured to saddle upon *his* shoulders every possible expense there was any decent pretext for transferring from his own!

“There would have been some equivalent for a few hundred pounds thrown away,” he observed, “had Charles persevered in his original fancy, and netted the pink-and-white Miss, with the fifty thousand pounds, who was going to throw herself away, in revenge for his desertion, upon a weazened-faced lord, old enough to be her father. Money was money. In *her* case, the advantage was real. But what was the naked truth of Lady Alicia’s fortune? Ten thousand pounds!—a paltry ten thousand pounds! As to the appointment promised him,—places under Government (even if he had the least chance of getting one) were all moonshine; and with regard to the five hundred per annum, to be paid by the old cat of a grandmother, what security had he for the realization of the engagement, supposing she were to die in the interim? No, no! It was no use deceiving themselves. Charles had *his* five hundred a-year, and his wife hers; and all the rest was leather and prunella.”

“And I should like to see,” added the malicious man, speaking as earnestly as though he *really* coveted the sight, “two people of *their* preposterous pretensions starving upon an income, which I, who am neither the worst of managers nor the most luxurious of men, can hardly contrive to make cover the wants of life! Fine work, forsooth, when my lady gets put to the push! Fine work, when Mr. Varnished-boots gets dunned for the amount of a brewer’s bill! Of all things in this world, commend me to a shabby-genteel establishment, with a ladyship in tatters at its head!”

All this virulence was produced by a private request made to him at Heriford Castle by his son, that, on quitting their house, he would fee the groom of the chambers with a five-pound note.

“*A five-pound note?* Did Mr. Charles Barrington happen to know, pray, the number of shillings contained in a five-pound note? A labourer’s wages for a couple of months!”

“I assure you, sir,” persisted his son, “that, considering the occasion of your visit here, you cannot give less. Whittingham will probably look for *ten*. But five is the smallest sum you could offer.”

It was in vain his father protested, that if, in former days, any gentleman visiting at Hexholm had given a five-pound note to his butler, he would have discharged the one and insulted the other on the spot.

“Hexholm was not Heriford Castle!” was his son’s unlucky reply.

“Oh! if you must needs quote lords for precedents,” retorted the enraged Mr. Barrington, “not a year passed, in those days, but I was twice or thrice staying at Lord Coylsfield’s; and I will wager my head *his* servants would have thought me mad had I offered such a fee.”

“You had not just married your son to Lord Coylsfield’s daughter!” rejoined Charles, inwardly thanking heaven that this tyranny would soon be overpast; and, finding his father implacable,—as jealous over his pocket’s blood as though every drop of it flowed from his heart,—he arranged the matter secretly with his mother, and redeemed his family honour in the establishment of his father-in-law.

The wound inflicted upon his father’s covetousness had, however, never healed; and Mrs. Barrington’s country neighbours, who, expecting to see him come back from Heriford Castle with his heart turned wrong side before by the extraordinary promotion of his son, were amazed at perceiving that he not only resumed, on the morrow of his return, his old straw hat, rusty pea jacket, and unblacked highlows, but that he was far from elated by the match.

It was unaccountable! The Harmers of Hedgington, and Forsyths at the Vicarage, who were beginning to tattle in whispers of the Barrington family (as if there were something “uncanny,” or Aladdin-ish, in the destinies of a young man who had only to show his face to have the Sultan’s daughter offer him her hand), began to thaw again, and hold out theirs, as usual, to people who, though connected with a marquis, dispensed with having a coronet branded or ruddled on their shoulders.

The Chalkneys, on the other hand, were too curious to learn the details of the wedding, not to compromise with the spite which inclined them to stand aloof; more especially as they flattered themselves they could point out a flaw in the jewel so much the object of their envy.

“So, you did not manage to bring Lord Clandon back

with you, my dear Miss Brenton?" observed Sir Hildebrand (after hearing Mrs. Barrington repeat, in answer to his congratulations, the answer which, in every case, she tried to make with untearful eyes and an unflinching voice, "that her son had indeed made a fortunate choice, and enjoyed every prospect of happiness"). "We Buckinghamshire bumpkins were rather in hopes you would have persuaded him to return, and spend the winter at Greensells."

"Greensells is not thought a very healthy winter residence," was Maria's unembarrassed reply. "If Sir Rupert should fulfil his intentions of retiring from the county before parliament meets, Lord Clandon *must* be on the spot. Otherwise, I hardly think he will be here again this winter."

Mrs. Barrington,—who had been too much taken up at Heriford Castle by an event so important in her life as the wedding of her only son, to take much heed of aught beside, and knew only that the earl had been attentive to Miss Brenton, but, as the fact had proved, without the smallest intention of offering her his hand,—was afraid the poor girl might feel annoyed by what was evidently intended as an attack. She did not surmise the perfect self-security of her niece. She did not guess with what vigilant care Lord Clandon had watched over every step taken by Maria in his father's house; how unceasingly he had endeavoured to divert her mind from its girlish troubles; how fondly he had removed the thorns from her path; how near her he had stood during the marriage ceremony, that he might hurry her away in case the anguish of her soul should break forth; and above all, how tenderly he had pressed her hand at parting, when assisting her into the carriage in the dim light of a drizzly November morning.

"Should you be very angry if you were to receive a letter from me on your return home?" he had ventured to whisper, while lending her his arm across the great hall, in the face of an assembled file of livery servants, with the supercilious Mr. Whittingham at their head.

"*Angry?* Oh, no!—it would be so kind of you to write!" was her ingenuous reply; "particularly if you hear news of the travellers. You know how negligently Charles corresponds with Easton."

And if, in the course of the day, it occurred to her to ask herself, a thousand times, what good deed Lady Alicia could have done in the sight of Providence to entitle her to such a reward as the hand of her cousin Charles, she more than once added to the inquiry, "and such a brother as Lord Clandon."

For, as a brother, she conceived him to be invaluable. No matter, she thought, whether a brother's figure be uncouth, or his complexion muddy,—he is always a brother,—the closest, dearest, and truest of friends; and, from the friendship he bestowed upon *her*, who had no claims upon his kindness, save having given him a crust of bread one day when he took her for the housekeeper and seen that his pointers were fed whenever they accompanied her uncle home from shooting, she could readily conceive what must be the warmth of his attachment to the sisters of his flesh and blood. She *did*, certainly, when allowing herself to desire what was impossible, sometimes wish she had such a brother as Lord Clandon.

The inquiries of Sir Hildebrand Chalkneys, therefore, afforded her more pleasure than pain. She liked to hear the sound of Lord Clandon's name. She liked to hear his sojourn at Greensells talked of as possible. It would be so *very* pleasant to have him there again; so delightful to hear, *through* him, what was written to Heriford Castle by Lady Alicia!

Some days after the visit of the family from Pountney Hill, she was struck, while planting some hyacinth-roots, and thinking within herself with what different feelings she had been accustomed annually to execute the same task, when there was a chance of getting them into bloom before Charles's winter vacation was at an end,—by the pertinacity with which her uncle kept hovering about her during her operations. So earnestly did he fix his eyes upon her, that, in her nervous fright, she took a sidelong view of her simple woollen gown, to be sure that she had not soiled it by her gardening, so as to run the risk of a reprimand. But not so much as a speck of mould was to be seen! And she soon discovered that he was not in one of his acrid humours; for he not only inquired whether the pots were the size she wanted, but offered to send the helper to remove them for her to the greenhouse, when she had done.

On proceeding into the parlour,—no longer interdicted since Charles's marriage,—to finish her gloomy afternoon with needlework, he still followed her, still kept fidgetting up and down the room.

At last, Mrs. Barrington, as if out of patience, observed, in answer to a whisper her husband had bent over her work-basket to inflict,—“ Why not ask her at once?—Maria has no secrets from *us*.”

While turning with wondering eyes from one to the other for a further explanation, Miss Brenton discovered her uncle to be thoroughly confused by this frank appeal. But Mrs. Barrington continued to speak out.

“ There was a letter in the post-bag for you this morning, my dear,” said she, bearing the Whitehaven post-mark; and your uncle is anxious to know the news from Heriford Castle. Your uncle fancies it was addressed in Lord Clandon's handwriting.” She could not add—“ and suspecting he has made you an offer, is wild to learn the truth.” But Maria was far from reluctant to satisfy Mr. Barrington's curiosity.

“ The letter was, indeed, from Lord Clandon, uncle,” she replied, “ but I was so disappointed at the contents,—I made so sure, when I opened it, that he would not have written unless he had news to send us of my cousin, and was so vexed when I found that it contained nothing but gossip about people I do not care for—the Maitlands, Lord Mortayne, that Jewish gentleman we all disliked so, all sorts of uninteresting persons,—that I put it aside after reading it; and, coming down too late for breakfast, was so afraid you might be angry that the whole thing went out of my head.”

Mr. Barrington looked as though he did not believe a word she was uttering; and though his wife nodded to him, aside, as much as to say, “ *You see!*—I told you the letter was of no manner of consequence,” even *she* did not imagine that Maria had told them the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

But my uncle, being disappointed, chose to be displeased.

“ Very extraordinary,” said he, “ that a man of Lord Clandon's age should take upon himself to open a correspondence with a girl of Maria's upon indifferent subjects,”

And his niece became instantly so alarmed lest he should interdict what afforded her sole chance of intelligence concerning the bride and bridegroom, that she offered to fetch the letter.

“ Perhaps her aunt would like to see what he said of the family at Heriford Castle ? ”

Mrs. Barrington longed to reply,—“ No, my dear child ! keep your letters to yourself ; no harm can possibly enter into any correspondence of yours.” But an admonitory gesture from her husband forbad her affectionate apostrophe ; and the letter was fetched,—*and read !*

“ Exactly what Maria informed us ! ” said Mrs. Barrington, in reply to the keenly-inquiring looks fixed upon her by her husband during the perusal ; but folding it up at the close, and delivering it back in too marked a manner to her niece, to admit of his saying,—“ I should like to read it myself.”

Baffled in his purpose, he would probably have burst out into a new condemnation of the correspondence, but that, at that moment, a tax-gatherer’s paper was brought into the room ; and he contented himself by venting his savageness on the footman,—pointing out to him, by traces on the meagre Scotch carpet, that he had been out of doors, and forgotten to wipe his shoes.

A moment afterwards he followed the man out of the room, to ascertain whether the extortioner who brought the paper had left the premises. And Mrs. Barrington’s heart was glad. For, had he chosen to insist on reading the letter, he would instantly have seen through the vein of tenderness so wholly unperceived by Maria ; instantly discovered that there needed but the smallest hint of reciprocity of feeling to induce Lord Clandon to propose ; and the advice which he might have felt called upon to offer to his inexperienced niece would have been the very thing to determine her to break off the acquaintance.

Meanwhile, if the letter from Heriford were thus satisfactory, those, or rather *that* from the travellers was NOT. Very short,—very cold,—it intimated only that they had determined to spend the winter at Paris. To the English ambadress, Lady Alicia Barrington was nearly related ; and the number of noble *émigrés* harboured at Heriford

Castle during the revolution afforded her a strong connection with the Faubourg St. Germain. They consequently anticipated a gay and pleasant season, and were to complete their bridal year by a summer tour of the German baths.

It was well that Charles refrained from adding—"after which we proceed to Italy to accomplish a second:" such being, at present, the project of Lady Alicia, in order to estrange her husband entirely from family connections, with which she felt she could have nothing in common. For, as it was, poor Maria regarded the decree with despair.

"It is the same," she observed to Mrs. Barrington, "as being told that we are never to see him again. For you heard what Lady Chalkneys was saying the other day, about a long residence abroad effecting a total transformation of the character. Charles will come back to us another man."

"He *may*, perhaps," replied her aunt; "but I never allow myself, dearest Maria, to be much alarmed by Lady Chalkney's showings. Her object is less to say what is true, than what will make others uneasy."

It was difficult, however, on so hazy a November day, with all the plants remaining in the flower-beds killed down by the frost,—the very small fire allowed by Mr. Barrington's parsimony smouldering into yellow smoke in the grate,—nothing to be done in the garden; and in the house, only the hemming of a new set of table-linen purchased for the chance of the noble bride having condescended to visit them before she left England, or the perusal, for the twentieth time, of the "Guardian," "Adventurer," and "Hawkesworth's Telemachus," relics of her school classics (a subscription to the Tring book-club being rigorously interdicted by her uncle), it was difficult, under the pressure of social enjoyments such as these, not to be a little desponding.

A deep-seated sense of religion rendered her patient; affection for the kind aunt, who was her fellow-victim, prompted her to endeavour to be even cheerful. But there were moments when it was impossible for poor Griselda not to feel that the whole remainder of her life was November, and that November was a dreary time!

CHAPTER XIX.

O mio tesoro,
 Ancor non son sicuro, ancor i' tremo.
 A dir-ti il vero ; e mi par d'ora in ora
 Che 'l sonno mi si rompa,
 E che tu mi t'involi, anima mia.—GUARINI.

THAT November might be made to wear a very different aspect, Maria Brenton would have speedily admitted, could she have taken a bird's-eye view, just then, of Wolseley Hall.

All that money, all that taste, all that imagination could procure, was there displayed. To welcome Lord Mortayne to her father's house, in a style calculated to inspire him with high notions of her pretensions, Eleanor had spared neither cost nor pains; and, now that she was about to restore him to liberty, Sir Wolseley seconded her wishes by allowing her unlimited sway.

Even before the announcement of her marriage, his goodwill towards her had considerably increased, on finding the burthen of chaperonage less heavy than he expected. No longer aggravated by the perpetual diatribes of his father, he had begun to see that a young sister was no such terrible thing. The admiration she had excited in London, the decree of Lord Esher, and others of his stable-haunting clique, "that there might be handsomer women in London, but, by Jove, no one showed blood like Miss Maitland!" had administered almost as largely to his pride, as though it were said of a filly bred in the Wolseley stables. There was, in fact, something in the character of his sister's style of beauty peculiarly agreeable to him; something of the race-horse,—something characteristic of a winner of the Oaks.

And now that she was about to leave him, how could he do less than welcome his new brother-in-law in the way most agreeable to her? He did not *fancy* Lord Mortayne. He thought him a flimsy fine gentleman, as well as a *roué* in grain. He even thought him "a bit of a spoon;" and

often wondered what sort of a figure he would cut on Bay Slapdash, in the blind country round Heriford Castle! But as Nell had decidedly made up her mind to marry him, and he was about to become a guest at Wolseley Hall, there was too much of the gentleman at the bottom of Sir Wolseley's selfishness not to render him a hospitable host.

When Mortayne arrived there, consequently, after issuing such orders as would place his own residence in a condition to receive his lovely bride, he was startled to perceive the disparity between the villa-like slightness of the only home his early follies had left him to offer to Miss Maitland, and the handsome old squire-archival residence which constituted her notions of country life. But that from the moment he caught sight of her fair face, he thought only of *her*, he would have felt humiliated by the solidity of the square old family mansion, with its groinings of cedar and oak, its fine old plate,—sterling old pictures,—sound old wine,—famous old breed of deer and horses, and dogs and cattle,—its ancient avenue of elms, and certain oaks which were certified as ancient trees at the time of the Hanoverian succession.

For it was a handsome family mansion; the father, grandfather, and great grandfather of Sir Wolseley, if sotters of their own home-brewed, had lived upon their estate, and improved it; or their fair descendant had not now, perchance, been on the eve of becoming a peeress of the realm.

The thing, however, that struck him *most* in the house, was the good taste with which Eleanor, without encroaching on the arrangements of the somewhat low-browed and high chimney-pieced suite of drawing-rooms, with their rich old damask furniture, and glorious old paintings in heavy old frames, had limited her interference to a single chamber; a chamber fronting the morning sun, and overlooking a fine terrace, which she had caused to be hung with flutings of Indian chintz, and fitted up with antique furniture of carved or twisted ebony, rescued by her zeal from the old family lumber-room to which it was consigned on the refurnishing of the mansion, early in the last century. Neither pictures nor glasses, nor any costly ornament, had been introduced

to mar the chaste simplicity of the spot. Only her musical instruments, only her books, only a few simple vases filled with the choicest flowers. It was exclusively a young girl's room.

"Thank Heaven!" was the secret ejaculation of Lord Mortayne, on visiting her sanctuary. "Whatever Sir Wolseley may delight in, her own tastes, at least, are pure and simple. She will not despise her future home."

It did not occur to the enamoured man, that what the girl had accepted, because unable to compass more, might not suffice the ambitions of the matron. But, had he surmised that it was because the little terrace-room and the house in which she could not legislate to her liking were hateful to her, that she married him at all, the high-minded Sophia de Capell would indeed have been amply avenged.

Meanwhile Sir Wolseley welcomed him cordially to the Hall, and placed horses, dogs, and master at his disposal; and his satisfaction was completed by the smiles that irradiated the face of his Eleanor when he placed before her the rich dressing and jewel-cases adorned with her future coronet, which were his wedding present. Lord Mortayne had no near relations; so that the shower of *cadeaux*, which sometimes accompany the bridal of people of more extended connexions, was unluckily wanting. And when he showed her, with a pleased air, a variety of gifts of no great value except as tributes of regard, which had been dispatched to "Morty" by such attached friends as Lord Bowbridge, and a few of his co-mates, it was no small joy to be able to exhibit, in return, a noble casket of family diamonds which had been presented to her by her brother, with the flattering observation, "that if he should ever be guilty of the folly of taking a wife, he would sooner see her hanged than wearing jewels worn by his mother."

"We must get them reset before the season," said Eleanor, carelessly, while showing them to Lord Mortayne. "In their present state, they are as heavy and tasteless as an old *epergne*. But the brilliants themselves are of great beauty."

Slight as was the observation, it sufficed to suspend the bridegroom's breath. "*The Season!*"—That hateful word, which he would fain have obliterated from the land's lan-

guage! That hateful word, which he had hoped was, at least, effaced from the mind of *her* he loved.

It had vexed him beyond measure, when, in the correspondence produced by their temporary separation at Heriford Castle, he found Eleanor strongly advocating the solemnization of their marriage in London. As her brother had no house in town, she proposed being married from an hotel. "It would be so convenient," she said, "for the completion of her *trousseau*, as well as so pleasant an escape from the publicity and formality they had recently seen attending the wedding at Heriford Castle."

Not that Lord Mortayne by any means suspected his Eleanor of having formed in her noviciate as a *débutante* a fixed idea of a fashionable wedding at St. George's, with the proper allotment of ladyships for bridesmaids, duchesses for spectators, and a bishop to solemnize the rite, disliked the notion of "taking the ring" without a due proportion of metropolitan display. But he wanted her to appreciate, as *he* did, the delight of breathing their mutual vows in the secluded village church of her birthplace,—thinking only of *him*, and eager only to escape to a still more domestic solitude.

She had ceded to his wishes, without apprizing him that the seeming concession was produced by her brother's absolute *veto* to the London scheme, and open declaration of his determination not to sacrifice more than a day's hunting to her nuptials. But, however enchanted by her ready relinquishment of her plans, the devoted lover could not but tremble at the indications revealed by this accidental allusion to the coming spring. He seemed to behold an apparition of Old Vassall's face, grinning in malicious delight over her shoulder, at the realization of his prophecies!

So averse was he, however, to produce even a ripple upon the glassy surface of his present happiness, that he said not a word. There would come a time, hereafter, to wean her from any projects she might have formed at the instigation of the giddy younger daughters of Lady Heriford. Once installed with him in the paradise he would create for her at Mortayne, by the shores of his own beautiful Windermere, in the midst of the loveliest scenery of the British

Islands, it would be his own fault if she had leisure to languish after the dusty desert of Hyde Park.

People in love are all but Chinese in the limitation of their perceptions. For them the world seems comprised in

—the little space

Two loving arms confine.

And while the fascinated Morty sat spell-bound in one of the old ebony chairs, his eyes fixed upon the loveliest of faces, with the slender snow-white hand of her on whom his soul doated extended towards him from the opposite sofa and folded within his own, an earthquake might have shook the house, and he had scarcely felt the shock. Never was there, in short, a more submissive victim to the potent spell of

Moments, when we gather from a glance
 More joy than from all future pride or praise,
 Which kindle manhood, but can ne'er entrance
 The heart in an existence of its own,
 Of which another's bosom is the zone.

“When I reflect,” murmured he, as soon as the departure of Sir Wolseley, with his dogs and keepers, secured him the happiness of a *tête-à-tête* with her who was so soon to become his for ever,—“when I reflect, dearest, upon the almost miraculous nature of my happiness,—that *I* who, to my shame be it spoken, have lived almost exclusively with what is vile and worthless, and wasted among *them* the sunshine of my life,—should have obtained the affections of a creature so bright, so unsullied, so new to all the impulses of life, and so pure from all its corruptions, it scarcely seems just that Providence should ordain me such a treasure. Who knows better than I, Eleanor, the brilliant fortunes you might have commanded? Who knows better than I, the admiration lavished upon you in London wherever you appeared? And all this, darling, have you renounced for my sake!”

Not a word in reply! How could she answer such an adjuration? But it was not an answer he needed. All the ardent lover desired was, that she should smile upon him for ever, as she was then smiling, and gently return, as at that moment, the fervent pressure of his hand.

The friends, the numerous friends, to whom "Morty" was so dear, could hardly have wished him happier, had they been eye-witnesses of his infatuation; and when Lord and Lady Heriford arrived with the two younger girls, who, as a medium between Lord Mortayne's dislike of a public wedding and the established usages of society, were to officiate as bridesmaids to the young kinswoman whom they would fain have hailed as a sister, Lady Mary's first letter from Wolseley Hall to her friend, Lady Barbara Bernardo, announced, in addition to the great fact, that, "after all, Wolseley was a horrid, dull, old heavy place, good only for a fox-hunting squire; that she knew not which was stupidest, the house or the master; and that if she had married Sir Wolseley, she should have been the most moped and miserable creature in the world,"—the intelligence, far more likely to interest her correspondent, that "never was man so over head and ears as Lord Mortayne! Much as she had heard of the violent nature of first love, she saw the *last* was far more to be dreaded."

The Marchioness of Heriford, meanwhile, who had accepted as a last chance of attack upon Sir Wolseley the invitation so earnestly made by Eleanor only that an account of her happy nuptials might be transmitted to the travellers at Paris (her own point lace and diamonds quadrupling in value those of Lady Alicia Barrington), could not forbear observing to her host, that "had she been aware of the impossibility of tearing their dear Eleanor, even for a moment, from the side of Lord Mortayne, she should hardly have undertaken so long a journey for the pleasure of her company."

And though Sir Wolseley, hospitable, if not polished, fulfilled the intentions of the complainant by making full amends for Eleanor's remissness, Lady Heriford did not the less whisper, on the morning of the wedding, to her friend Lady Essendon, who, with one or two other country neighbours of note, came over in their carriages and four to do honour to the ceremony, attracted by the unflinching bait of bride-cake and favours, that, "in spite of their *seeming* reciprocity of feeling, she should have been better pleased to see her young friend united with a man more of her own age and character, than Lord Mortayne,—a man for whom

the illusions of life were beginning, rather than at their close."

"I was at her mother's wedding!" added her ladyship, in a Mrs. Candour-like tone. "One of the prettiest creatures in the world was my poor cousin Matilda! But she *would* marry a country-gentleman, when all she cared for was London; and poor Lady Maitland's ending is, unhappily, no secret!"

"Lady Heriford has given up all hopes of Sir Wolseley, or she would not come out with that ugly story just now!" mused, in her turn, the Countess of Essendon. "'Save me from my friends!' might be parodied in this instance by 'Beware of the reminiscences of a cousin!'"

"I can tell you that it made the poor marchioness yellow with spite," said Sir Wolseley, on the other hand, to Lord Esher, when, the week following, the first bachelor-party at Cub Castle was inaugurated, "to have to carry off her two ugly angels in one direction, while Nelly was whirled off, in another, for Mortayne's family place! The coronet on the bridal chariot formed *too* disagreeable a contrast to that of Lady Alicia Barrington!"

Every one, however, did not view the two marriages in the same relative light. On perusing in the papers the formal announcement which proved that the once hated name of Eleanor Maitland had ceased to exist, Maria Brenton observed, with a heavy sigh, to Mrs. Barrington, "Poor thing!—what a sad change for her to be married to that cross-looking ugly man, after flattering herself she had secured the affections of my cousin!"

The self-same paper, conveying the account of the wedding, contained, however, another announcement, which instantly absorbed the whole attention of Easton Hoo. Extracts from the Indian papers, brought by the Overland Mail, recorded, among other deaths at Madras, of cholera, that of "Maria, only surviving daughter of Humphrey Barrington, Esq.

Yet, not a line from the afflicted father!—On occasion of his former family affliction, his first impulse had been to write to them: but now: not a word!

"Who knows," suggested the affectionate brother, "but Humphrey may be dead too?—The cholera is an infectious

disorder.—He may have died after the printing of the papers!”

“More likely, poor fellow, he was too much overcome to write!” observed Mrs. Barrington, wiping her eyes. “Humphrey was a most affectionate father; and a second blow of that nature is more severe than the first. He has nothing left on earth to care for *now!*”

But her husband did not seem to consider this contingency by any means a thing to cry about.

“We have become,” said he, “his only heirs; and, were not Humphrey the most eccentric man breathing, I should have every right to consider myself secure of his splendid fortune.”

“Or, at least, *Charles*—to whom he has been so generous,” observed Mrs. Barrington, almost in a whisper.

“And in that case,” added Maria, on whom nothing that included the name of Charles was lost,—“in that case, how grievously would my poor cousin repent his interested marriage.”

“I do not see why the claims of my son are to be put forward in opposition to mine!” exclaimed Mr. Barrington, with growing indignation. “I may have been an imprudent man, but I have done nothing to deserve being cut off by my brother. Now that his daughters are dead, I am, in fact, his heir-at-law—his next of kin.—A hint was given me about a twelvemonth ago, that my brother had been inquiring about the Hexholm estate, and was anxious to buy back the family property; which shows that the name of Barrington is not indifferent to him. Its male representative must, consequently, have some importance in his eyes.”

“Who knows, then,” said Maria, with more rashness than was her wont, “but that, now my uncle is left alone in the world, he may choose to marry again? He is not much more than fifty. He might live to have sons of his own.”

The hurricane, which had uprooted so many trees in Greensells Chase, and sent the Earl of Clandon to sleep in Charles Barrington’s bed, some months before, was a storm not worth mentioning compared with that into which the covetous man broke forth at this untimely suggestion.

That all the joy he had experienced on learning his bro-

ther's deprivation of his last surviving comfort, should be nipped in the bud by an impertinent conjecture, without rhyme or reason, made evidently for the express purpose of annoying him!—Maria never omitted an occasion of saying or doing what she knew would be most disagreeable to him!—Maria was the most ungrateful, as well as the most mischievous girl in the world; she would, doubtless, be going about, and gossiping over the probability of her uncle's marriage, with those idiotic old Forsyths, or that impudent coxcomb of a fellow at Pountney Hill.

“But I tell you this frankly, Miss Brenton,” added he, “that matters are not going to remain in this house upon the footing they *have* been. Charles's confounded marriage has been such a pull upon my narrow means, that I can no longer afford to keep idle hangers-on in my house. Your aunt and myself have come to a time of life when the charge of a young person who has little or no claim upon us, is too heavy a charge—more especially one devoid of all gratitude or affection. And I therefore take this opportunity of repeating in plain English, Maria, that though, in consequence of Charles's marriage, I consented to Mrs. Barrington's wish of keeping you with her over Christmas, the earlier in January you remove to Cornbury Hall, the more convenient to *me*.”

This abrupt and brutal apostrophe was, in truth, the mere result of exasperation. So far from wishing to drive his niece from his roof, the preference with which she was regarded by Lady Alicia Barrington's brother, even if insufficient to determine Lord Clandon to offer her his hand, was enough to render her presence supportable, as an attraction to the new member for the county. But in the heat of his rage he had improvisated a threat, just as in the heat of conversation people improvisate convictions on subjects upon which they have never reflected. Convinced that Miss Brenton, so attached to that cheerless home, would implore leave to stay, and her aunt intercede with him to relent in her favour, he would have threatened her with Sierre Leone or Botany Bay, instead of Cornbury Hall, had the alternative been at his disposal, in requital of such a crime as imagining her uncle Humphrey's marriage.

But on the present occasion, neither that evening, nor

the next, nor the next, was the smallest concession sought at his hands.—Mrs. Barrington, convinced in her own mind that it needed only for the course of Lord Clandon's true love to run a little rough to make it overleap all bounds, considered that, if Maria were domesticated for a time in a family to which he had no access, he would unquestionably be driven to the extremity of a proposal; and she consequently spoke in such terms on the subject, when left alone with Maria, after the despot's departure, that, believing her aunt to be entirely acquiescent in the cruel views of her uncle, the poor girl, with a breaking heart, indited the letter to Mr. and Mrs. Cornbury which was to fix a day for her entrance into their family. She was always to have gone to them at Christmas. It was only a fortnight's delay that she had gained.

When a kind answer arrived, accepting with joy the fulfilment of an engagement which they had begun to fear, they said, she might be tempted by older friends to overlook, Mr. Barrington was almost as much vexed by the sequel as he had been by her imprudent prediction. From the moment of his son's marriage, he had never intended her to go. He was too well aware of her value as a mender and maker, to turn his sister's child out of doors. If the poor orphan had no value in his eyes, the sempstress was deserving consideration.

It was now, however, too late. He had thrown her off, and she was accepted by others; and Easton Hoo might do as it could for its flower-beds and linen-press. The poor of the village would lose their benefactress, the sick and the aged their friend. The angel was destined to leave them, and be no more seen.

Another letter soon afterwards arrived, with the Whitehaven postmark, and sealed with the Heriford arms. But no allusion was made to the contents. Even Mr. Barrington appeared to understand that he had broken the iron reins of his authority over his niece. Even Mr. Barrington asked no questions.

His wife, on the other hand, though aware that an answer had been despatched by Maria to the post-office from motives of delicacy forbore. Not but that she secretly desired to know what was passing, in the fervent hope that

something had occurred, or still might occur, to prevent Maria from being driven out into the world, to the mercy of distant kinsfolk; and it was only when she saw the poor girl hang as dejectedly as ever over her work on the evening of despatching her letter, that she gave up her hopes of a happier *dénouement*. No prudish fears distracted her mind concerning her niece's correspondence with a young man. She knew Maria, she knew Lord Clandon. She was satisfied of the excellence and uprightness of both; and, with the trust of a virtuous and holy nature, in which faith is an inherent quality, left them to themselves.

But, with all her knowledge of Maria's simplicity of character, little did Mrs. Barrington surmise that the letter so calmly indited, so silently sent, contained a refusal of the hand of the future Marquis of Heriford, with his rent-roll of thirty thousand a year. Not because she thought him now, as at their first acquaintance, a surly, unlettered boor; but because unable to regard him with the exclusive affection she considered indispensable to the happiness of married life.

In spite of all his good resolutions, Lord Clandon had been rash, precipitate, injudicious. Unable longer to restrain his feelings, or resist his eagerness to take that gentle woman to his heart, and create for her the happy destinies to which she was so thoroughly entitled, he had forestalled the right moment; and the consequence was, the defeat of his hopes.

"I write to you in all openness of heart," was the tenor of Maria's answer, "as to a friend whom I dearly prize. I will conceal nothing from you. I will enter fully into all your arguments.

"You tell me that, at our first acquaintance, you were deterred from asking me to become your wife, only from perceiving how strongly I was attached to my cousin. But that now he is married, the objection ceases—that my ill-placed affection must be at an end.

"Dear Lord Clandon, I love him still—as well as I ever loved him—and better than I should ever love yourself. You forgot that he is endeared to me by ties of blood, as well as by the choice which is independent of our will.

Charles is still my cousin—still my childhood's companion—still my nearest and dearest. I may never see him again; but I shall always, *always* love him as at first.

“Were I, for the sake of your kind society, and to secure myself a quiet home, to accede to your generous proposals, think how it would be with my conscience, when I knew, every hour of my life, that *his* interests were dearer to me than your own!

“Do not be angry with me, therefore, for my inability to meet your intentions as you desire; or withdraw your friendship from one who has so few friends in this world, that she regards you, perhaps, more dearly than those akin to you by nature.

“For kindness' sake, therefore, try and forget that you ever thought of me in any other light than as your most obliged and sincere friend,

“MARIA.”

CHAPTER XX.

With calm eyes
 Looking through tears, yet lifted to the skies;
 Wistful, but patient,—sorrowful, but mild,
 As asking God when He would claim his child.
 A face too young for such a tranquil grief.

THE NEW TIMON.

VERY dreary were the winter days that ensued. There was no merry Christmas that year at Easton Hoo. While Charles and Lady Alicia Barrington were launching, at Paris, into every sort of pastime and diversion,—Lady Alicia taking a studious lesson in the arts and mysteries which assign such unaccountable influence in society to even the least lovely Frenchwoman, ambitious of rule, and clever enough to spin around her the cobwebs of intrigue, and her husband taking, for the first time, an independent stand on the golden ladder of fashion; and while Lord and Lady Mortayne were enjoying their opium dream of passion whose Cupids were curled and winged by a fashionable *coiffeur*, and its Temple of Hymen interwoven with spun-

sugar, as by confectionary art, Maria, poor Maria, was arming her strength for a separation from persons and objects to which most people would have been easily reconciled to bid farewell!

Every day of her remaining sojourn was counted, as by a prisoner under sentence of death; and every day that removed a notch, seemed to sink her deeper to the earth. A solemn presentiment forewarned her, that, when she quitted the Hoo, it would be never to cross its threshold again. She should behold no more the scenes which had witnessed her little all of earthly happiness; and, despite the unpropitious state of the season, she performed pilgrimages of adieu to every spot connected with the few bright reminiscences of her youth; among them, to *her* "Valley of Palms,"—a ravine buried in the midst of the woodlands, where, on a midsummer expedition with her aunt and cousin, four years before, having severely sprained her ankle, in endeavouring to leap a gravelly grip without troubling Charles for the assistance of his hand, he had been forced to carry her in his arms for nearly a mile, to a hovel, where she lay in agony till the market cart was procured that conveyed her home.

Every evening, beside the lofty chimney, in which the wind was howling as if in sympathy with her sadness, Maria Brenton sat indulging in the morbid fancy that no other fireside on earth could cast so cheerful a reflection as the one beside whose mantel-piece hung a wretched daub of Charles Barrington, in his cap and gown; which, in an outbreak of academic pride, he had brought home from Oxford to his mother, at his first vacation.

Between the pauses of her stitching, she sometimes snatched a glance at it,—as a devotee, in the intervals of her prayers, raises her eyes to the altar-piece; and every night, when she retired to rest, and passed, at the head of the staircase, the chamber door, where, in better days, she had been accustomed to breathe as she passed a secret prayer of "God bless him!" her heart seemed to collapse at the thought that she was about to abide in a spot his foot had never trod,—among those to whom his features were unknown, and to whom his fortunes were indifferent.

All her griefs, however, were not connected with *him*.

Though of parting with her dear aunt she could not permit herself to think, lest she should be tempted into the abject and probably unavailing meanness, of throwing herself at her uncle's feet, and entreating him to permit her to remain,—even if as an hireling, under his roof,—there were minor griefs in which her tenderness found vent.

There was an old ragged-looking terrier, named Bur, which, by dint of kicks and cuffs, had been rendered submissive to Mr. Barrington, till it followed him about the farm like a familiar spirit; but which, being a beast of proper sentiments, had attached itself fondly to Maria, in gratitude for the caresses with which, when her uncle's back was turned, she repaid the life of coercion to which, like herself, it was condemned.

Any one who witnessed the grotesque caperings, or heard the uncouth yells by which the poor beast demonstrated, every morning, its joy at seeing its protectress again, if they happened to meet when the despot was away, was fully justified in looking round for a cup of water, as a test of the poor dog's sanity. But, if the same anybody had spoken gruffly to Maria, or hazarded a menacing gesture towards her, the terrier's teeth would have instantly met in his flesh; and whenever Mr. Barrington went visiting to Poutney Hill, or Hedgington, so as to leave his trembling subjects at liberty for a time, till his unwelcome return the place of Bur was at Maria's feet; looking up with piteous love into her face, and wagging his shabby tail with the velocity of a fly-wheel, in token of allegiance.

That the poor beast would be cuffed and kicked for the rest of its days, without a consolatory word in return, and go whining to the door of her empty room without the hope of a charitable hand to throw a crust to its hunger, was sad to think of. She would have given worlds to carry Bur with her to Cornbury. But she would as soon have thought of asking her uncle for his gold repeater. Not that he cared a rush for the faithful animal; but "Bur was such a good one after the rats!"

A far greater grief, however, regarded her poor;—consisting of a village *protégé* or two, upon whom her hours of recreation had been patiently expended;—mothers of many children, whose cares had been lightened by her assistance;

and above all, a paralytic woman, to whom she used to go and read,—because lame Peggy was so cross and thankless, that no one else would be troubled on her account. What would they do when she was gone! Her uncle was too well known among them, for them ever to look for aid to Easton; and Dr. and Mrs. Forsyth, were old people, indifferent, through the sloth of decrepitude, to the wants of the poor.

She did what she could, in preparation for the remainder of the winter;—divested herself of all she could spare from her scanty wardrobe, and left herself as nearly penniless as prudence would admit. It was in vain she applied to her uncle for a slight advance from the sum of three thousand pounds, vested in his hands as her guardian, over which, on coming of age in the month of March ensuing, she was to obtain full disposal; assuring him that the habits of Cornbury Hall were such as rendered it indispensable to present herself in suitable attire.

All the answer she obtained was, that “she should not have thrown away her last quarter’s allowance on a marriage gift to her cousin’s wife!” Mr. Barrington would not hear of advancing a shilling. Though the Cornburys, who were wealthy as well as worthy people, and who, on two occasions, when Maria paid them a visit, had received her with all the cordiality of kinsfolk, evinced the utmost indignation at her uncle’s suggestion, that “she could pay for her keep,” there were travelling and other unusual expenses to be provided for, on which he largely insisted.

“Nor did he choose her to be wasting her money on a set of idle scamps, who were always pulling at his hedges, and pilfering in his fields.”

Not a shilling, in short, was to be had; and all she could do was to sit up a few nights, to knit a lambswool jacket for lame Peggy, as a parting token of Christian benevolence. She did it, however, with fear and trembling. For if, through the cracks of the ill-fitting window-shutters, Mr. Barrington had happened to perceive the light, he would have accused her of wasting his substance, or perhaps of incendiary intentions against the old tenement of the Hoo.

Not a syllable had she breathed in the village of her approaching departure: unwilling, amid her many cares, to

expose herself to the lamentations of those who loved her both for their own sake and hers. She could do so little for them, in consolation, that she did not want to see their tears. When she wished lame Peggy good-bye, it was only as if about to absent herself for a time, as on occasion of their visit to Heriford Castle; and, though many might have perceived, in the faltering tone in which she bade her keep, for her sake, the Testament in which she was wont to read to her, and which was one of her own school-girl possessions, indications that they were to meet no more,—the lame woman thought only of her present,—and contented herself with the “God bless you, Miss,” of her daily thanks.

It was only to Dr. and Mrs. Forsyth, that, on the day preceding her departure, she admitted that she was quitting Easton for ever. From them, who had been as kind to her as their age and circumstances would permit, she did not conceal her tears;—for it was to *them* she had to entrust the care of her aunt. When she was gone, Mrs. Barrington would be left so much alone! And of late she had been ailing. A cold, caught at Heriford Castle, threatened her with a sickly winter. With clasped hands and streaming eyes, therefore, she implored the good people to “visit her often,—to visit her whether she would or no,—to——”

She could not define the exact measure of the good offices she asked of them,—for tears choked her utterance the moment she began to talk of her aunt. She was not, however, the less understood; and, on turning towards them to take leave of that gloomy little vicarage parlour, in which she would have lingered for ever, Dr. Forsyth, instead of simply pressing the extended hand of the girl, to whom, for so many years past, he had administered in peace and holiness the great mysteries of their faith, placed his hands, tremulous from age, upon her head, and bade God bless her, and prosper the holy aims of her life.

All this was grievous preparation for the stress upon her nerves to arise from the morrow’s parting. When, however, on her return home, she noticed the pale cheeks and haggard looks of Mrs. Barrington, she subdued her feelings at once, by an effort of which none but herself could understand the pain. She owed it to her aunt, that nothing should occur to harass *her* suffering heart.

She was to depart at midday. Her uncle, who had business with his lawyer concerning Charles's settlements, was to convey her by the evening train to the Blue Boar in Holborn,—where Mr. Cornbury, who was in town for a few days, to receive dividends and look at cattle-shows, would receive and escort her by the mail train to her future home. The great difficulty of the journey consisted, of course, in convincing Mr. Barrington that his ill-fed horses (which, whenever not wanted for the farm, were voted too old for work), could convey them to Tring. But this difficulty had been overcome, by reminding him of the cost of a fly, and all was now arranged;—so well arranged, indeed, that poor Mrs. Barrington foresaw no chance of a reprieve.

Though they were not to start till twelve o'clock, Mr. Barrington insisted that his niece's baggage should be brought down to the back-door by daybreak, that the task might not interfere with his footman's work for the day. And there they lay, corded and directed,—those shabby trunks and boxes and bundles; how different from the trimly array of varnished leather, and patent imperials, with which Lady Alicia had set forth on her continental tour!

It did not occur, however, to Maria Brenton, to feel ashamed of them, though alive to their unsightliness. They contained all her earthly treasures:—two faded miniatures of her father and mother; a lock of Mrs. Barrington's white hair; a sprig of withered ivy, taken from the Christmas decoration of their pew in Easton church; and the showy work-box presented to her by her cousin on his marriage, which she had never since found courage to take out of its case. The time would come, when even the old portmanteau, which there had been so much difficulty in closing, on account of the raggedness of the leathern strap, would become an object of interest to her, as having lain in a corner of the lumber-room at "home."

After seeing the packages carried out one by one, Maria was seating herself in the desolate room, which looked as even better chambers are apt to look after the personal belongings of the inhabitants have been removed, when the sound of her own name, vociferated by her uncle in his least mellifluous accents, caused her to start up and hurry down the creaking stairs.

On the second flight, however, she paused ; for she found he was talking *of* her—not talking *to* her. Mr. Barrington was addressing his calfish footman, or some other member of the establishment ; and Maria's blood curdled in her veins when she heard him shout, "You are an impudent fellow ! I don't believe, sir, Miss Brenton ever gave any orders of the kind !" Even at the eleventh hour she was fated to be exposed to a domestic storm !

While slowly proceeding down to the offices where the scene was taking place, in which she fancied her testimony might be necessary to extricate the servants from some scrape, into which she had been the means of betraying them, she still continued to hear the angry voice of her uncle.

"Four-and-sixpence, for a pack of damned newspapers ! " said he. "Newspapers sent me, without my orders ! Mrs. Varden must have been mad, to think I would receive them ! They must be sent back. I won't open them. As to Miss Brenton's letter——"

He paused : for by this time Maria had reached his side.

"Oh, you're here ?" said he, interrupting himself, while Dr. Forsyth's boy, who was standing by, with the letter-bag over his shoulder, respectfully ducked his head to the young lady so much respected in the village. "Pray, did you desire Mrs. Varden would forward on your letters to Cornbury Hall ? This ass of a fellow has gone and paid four-and-sixpence on my account for a bundle of old newspapers ; and pretends that there is a letter lying for you at the post-office, which she wouldn't give him as usual, because, forsooth, you wrote to her yesterday, saying your letters were to be forwarded on ; a letter—or rather packet—of which the postage amounts to seventeen-and-sixpence !"

"There must be some mistake," said Maria, mildly. "My only correspondents are Mrs. Cornbury and Lord Clandon ; and both of them use stamps."

"Any more orders, sir ?" said the boy, who was probably waiting for his four-and-sixpence.

"Yes ; no—I shall see Mrs. Varden myself presently, and let her know what I think about this business. The Tring post-office is the worst conducted in the shire," said

Mr. Barrington (as people usually say of the post-office nearest their residence), while slowly extricating from his chamois leather purse two shillings and a halfcrown, which he placed in the palm of the unlucky lad, as though wishing they were red hot for his sake. But having been forced during the process of payment, to place the roll of newspapers in Miss Brenton's hand, her quick eye was caught by the post-mark of the Overland Mail.

"These are Madras papers, sir," said she. "The letter or packet, said to be waiting for me at Tring, is probably from my uncle Humphrey."

"Stuff and nonsense! Have you ever been in the habit of corresponding with him?"

"I wrote to him *once*. There has been time," added she, after pausing to compute the number of months—"ample time for me to receive an answer."

But Mr. Barrington luckily did not hear. On finding that the packet he held in his hand consisted of Indian papers, he proceeded into the parlour to open it. It would not do, for the sake of four-and-sixpence, to risk offending his brother, by whom they must have been forwarded.

Maria longed to follow him, but had not courage. Something whispered to her that important intelligence must be contained in that costly packet. She hastened, therefore, to Mrs. Barrington's room, to announce the arrival of a packet of papers from Uncle Humphrey to his brother, and a heavy letter for herself.

But the sorrowing aunt who, already indisposed, had not closed her eyes all night, could not be persuaded to interest herself in anything not relating to Maria's departure. At that moment, what signified her uncle Humphrey?

"Sit down, dearest child," said she; "nearer to my bed, Maria, for I am so weak that I can hardly raise my voice. Are all your things ready?—Did Mary take you up the shawl and lace to put in your trunk?—No, don't thank me, my poor child! I shall never wear them again. I only wish I had hundreds such to give you, or anything else that could——"

"Most important news, my dear!" cried Mr. Barrington, throwing open the door, and kicking out of his way a footstool that lay between him and the bed. "Here's my

brother Humphrey dead!—Three years younger than myself—in the prime of life, one may say—and gone already! The account's quite authentic," said he, in a tone of much elation. "Here, you may read it yourself."

Perceiving that Mrs. Barrington had turned deadly faint at the shock, Maria hastened to raise her head, and offer a *vinaigrette*, which, for her journey's sake, she had in her pocket.

"Was my poor uncle long ill, sir? Did he suffer much?" said she, addressing Mr. Barrington, as soon as the poor woman was a little restored.

But the amiable husband, systematically opposed to anything like indisposition or emotion in his family, as a sad waste of time and money, had retreated to the window to reperuse, with all the *gusto* of deliberation, the account of his brother's decease.

"The person who was attentive enough to send me these papers," said he, ("probably my poor brother's man of business or physician), would have done much better to add a few lines, stating exactly how matters were. Here is a long paragraph, giving the account of how poor Humphrey was followed to the grave by all the high officials and leading merchants of Madras, and how a subscription was instantly opened to afford him a public monument; but not a syllable about the disposal of his property. Nothing beyond—'We understand that the lamented deceased leaves an only brother, Giles Barrington, Esq., of Hexholm Hall, in the county of Durham, who is his heir-at-law.'"

"But is there no account of the *cause* of his death?" inquired Mrs. Barrington, much affected by this startling disclosure of the death of her son's benefactor.

"Not much. The paper says he never held up his head after the loss of his last surviving daughter, with whom he had been on the point of returning to Europe for the enjoyment of his princely fortune, and probably to take a leading part in the legislation of Indian affairs."

"Poor man!—poor Humphrey!—what a hard destiny!" said his wife, not to *him*, but Maria, who was standing beside her pillow, as if satisfied of the hopelessness of obtaining sympathy from the heir-at-law.

"Is it not just possible," whispered Maria, in reply, "that

the letter I mentioned as waiting for me at Tring may relate to my uncle's decease?"

"By Jupiter, I should not be surprised!" cried Mr. Barrington, readily catching a whisper that regarded his personal interests. "Yet why on earth should they write to *you*? With me, he did not correspond; but those about him must know that he frequently wrote to my wife."

Though divided between displeasure that Maria should consider herself so nearly akin to the dead man as to be entitled to hear that he was no more, and curiosity to obtain further insight into the disposal of his brother's property, the latter feeling prevailed.

"I'll have the pony saddled, and be at Tring and back in an hour!" cried he. "I suppose, Maria, Mrs. Varden has no private orders from you not to give *me* your letters?"

And when he was really gone, and the aunt and niece were renewing the expressions of their sorrow for the poor exile who, though fated to survive his wife and children, had been denied the privilege of enjoying the fortune for which he had toiled so honourably, Mrs. Barrington drew Maria towards her, and imprinted a kiss on her forehead.

"At all events, this sad news brings some consolation!" said she. "You will not leave us now, Maria. *At least*, you will not leave us *to-day*. Sit down and write to the Cornburys. Tell them your aunt is ill and unhappy. Tell them you are staying to comfort your poor aunt."

Charles Barrington, careless as he was of the comfort of all belonging to him, might possibly have been shocked at the state in which the old shooting-pony, in which he had formerly taken delight, returned, an hour afterwards, to the hands of the old coachman in the Welsh wig; looking, in short, much as if prepared for tonsure with a lather of Atkinson's shaving-soap. Not, however, because the bearer of the memorable despatch. Had that been the case, Mr. Barrington's frantic interest in the contents would have prevented his respecting the seal; and, instead of galloping back to Easton Hoo, he might have thrown himself into the morning train, and hastened at once to town. But on reaching Tring, he found that the post-mistress, in whose eyes the correspondence between the young lady at Easton Hoo and the Earl of Claudon assigned her considerable import-

ance, had judged it better to despatch the huge Indian letter by a messenger of her own, seeing that Dr. Forsyth's boy had only declined taking it by reason of the unconscionable postage.

On Mr. Barrington's return, therefore, he found, as he expected, the letter in Miss Brenton's hands. He came too late, indeed, to witness her emotion in opening a packet which exhibited on its exterior as tremendous a show of black as Regent-street *magazin de deuil*—the double seal and half-inch borders containing enough to have placed a small family in decent mourning. He lost also the sight of the deathlike paleness that settled on her cheek as she perused the letter. Luckily, Mrs. Barrington, who had risen in the interim, was there to exhort her to composure.

It was not, however, the shock of learning that she was left sole heiress to her uncle's enormous fortune, which so blanched the cheek of Maria Brenton. All she thought of at present, was Mr. Barrington's indignation. All she murmured, amid her hysterical sobs, was, "How shall I ever dare to meet my uncle!"

"Be yourself, my child!" whispered her aunt, taking her steadily by the hand; "you have nothing to fear from him *now*. Praise be to Heaven, which has at length secured you the prosperity you will turn to so such good account!"

Before they could settle between them which of the two was to communicate the astounding news to Mr. Barrington, he was in the room; his face tinged with purple streaks, partly from the morning chill, and partly from repressed emotion. The woollen comforter tied over his chin served to render his words inaudible, and the hat, still slouched over his eyes, made their expression difficult to interpret. But, finding his questions unanswered by the two frightened women, he hastily tore off the muffler.

"You have opened the letter, then?" cried, he with a brevity that showed his whole soul to be in his words. "Tell me at once. To whom has he left his money?"

Maria dared not unclose her lips. The safest reply was to tender him the letter, which was signed by his brother's man of business, and contained a copy of the will.

"I can't wade through all this confounded rubbish!"

cried he, on perceiving that it contained many sheets of paper, and his mind misgiving him, from the downcast looks of his wife and niece. "Can't you speak out? *Whom* has he made his heir?"

"His niece Maria!" replied Mrs. Barrington, in a faint voice.

Let the reader be spared the recapitulation of the burst of execrations with which that astounding intelligence was received!

CHAPTER XXI.

Life's business done,—a million made,—what still
 Remain'd on earth?—Life's last caprice,—a will.
 The man was childless, but the world was wide.
 He thought on England, sign'd his name, and died.

THE NEW TIMON.

MRS. BARRINGTON might have experienced some compunction, had she been conscious of her share in the suggestion of Humphrey Barrington's will. For, though her own interests were indifferent to her by comparison with those of Maria, the prospects of her son were sacred.

The letter, written by Miss Brenton at her entreaty, and despatched by her intervention, had reached Madras only a day previous to the fatal illness of her uncle's daughter, who, deeply moved by its touching tenor, had instantly obtained from her father that, on their arrival in England, "her namesake, her poor cousin Maria, should become their inmate, and supply the place of the sister she had lost." Death-stricken by that terrible scourge of the East which leaves so little leisure to the victim for the expression of a parting wish, Miss Barrington had found a moment to falter to her distracted father,—“Bury me by my sister; and, when you arrive in England, dear papa, adopt Maria Brenton as your child. Her affectionate nature will be your consolation for our loss.”

When, therefore, shortly after the accomplishment of the first of these pious duties, the broken-hearted father was

apprised by his physicians that he must make his peace with the next world and wind up his affairs in this, the will in favour of his two girls, which he was forced to cancel, was replaced by one in favour of her who approached nearest them in name and nature. The self-sufficient nephew whose letters he had always held offensive, and whose ostentatious marriage he saw pre-announced in the papers, and the papers only, had no place in his regard. With the view of uniting him with one of his co-heiresses, he had instituted such a surveillance over Charles's proceedings at Oxford, as satisfied him there was not a grain of independence in his character, or steadiness in his mind; and it was consequently with justice-dealing sternness, as well as with the fond feeling generated by the death-bed prayer of his *own* Maria, that he instituted his orphan niece sole heiress to his prodigious wealth, on condition of her assuming the name of Barrington.

For, within the year, he had fulfilled his grand ambition of the last ten—the repurchase of the Hexholm property—the owner of which had for some time been coquetting with the predilections of the rich nabab; and to afford a happy home to him and his daughters on their arrival in England, the old place had been repaired and fitted up in a style of comfort, which nothing short of engrafting an Indian fortune on a country gentleman's could have justified. His agents in England (Mr. Fitzhugh, the head of the firm, being his personal friend, and recently returned from the land of rupees), had taken pride and pleasure in executing the commissions of one so liberal and so worthy; and it was to *them* Miss Barrington—Brenton,—no! let us give her the new name at once,—was referred for fuller particulars of her good fortune by their co-executor of the will, the resident man of business of Humphrey Barrington, who had attended him on his death-bed and assisted to lay his head in the grave.

The first impulse of the disappointed master of Easton Hoo (to extract four-and-sixpence from whom was like tearing out four of his teeth), was to declare he would set aside the will. After pouring forth unmeaning oaths that were frightful to hear, he swore that his brother was a Bedlamite,—that he had been eccentric from a boy,—and

that the death of his daughters had completed the overthrow of his mind.

“ Shall I give you the copy of the will, uncle, to take with you ? ” said Maria, on hearing him announce that he would proceed that very afternoon to town to consult his lawyers ; and, believing the offer, made in the simplicity of her heart, to be ironical, he was about to launch forth into fresh invectives, when the consequence, which even in *his* eyes she acquired by her succession to twelve thousand a-year, suspended the words upon his lips. Unable to revile her according to his wont, he quitted the room to curse her in secret, and vent his rage in kicks upon poor Bur.

“ My dear Maria,” said her aunt, sadly and gravely, after he had closed the door, “ you must not expect justice in this house. The great fortune that has fallen on you, requires you to act for yourself. Arduous as such a task may appear to one who has led such a life of submission as yourself, custom will soon render it easy : for remember that a single day converted the queen who rules us from a child into a dignified sovereign ! ”

“ *Her* childhood had not passed in obscurity and privation ! ” was the humble reply of the new heiress.

“ I offer you my advice to-day, as I have ever done, as a mother and a friend,” resumed Mrs. Barrington. “ Since your uncle is so full of animosity, you cannot leave Easton too soon. Go to London to-day,—go, before Mr. Cornbury has left it. Mr. Cornbury is not only a man of sense and integrity, but of business. *He* will enable you to confer with Mr. Fitzhugh. He will even escort you to Hexholm, if necessary. You must not be alone in this great emergency. I would be your companion myself, my dear girl, but am in so infirm a state, that I might be laid up on the journey, and an incumbrance. Mary shall accompany you to town, and place you in Mr. Cornbury’s hands. Once there, I am satisfied. I have already corresponded with him about you, and know the cordiality of his feelings.”

With a heavy sigh, the young heiress complied. The only difficulty was to signify her intentions to her uncle. Having done so, however, by letter, and in terms of such

dutiful self-abnegation as awoke in the mean mind of Mr. Barrington a hope that more might be gained by his influence over his niece, than he had been able to worm out of her benefactor, he expressed his intention of escorting her himself to London.

“ Situated as she now was, it was not proper she should go scampering over the country with a maid-servant,—it was not proper she should repair to such a place as the Blue Boar. He would take her to the hotel where his son and Lady Alicia had sojourned, when they passed through London, and which must, consequently, be the thing; and these agents, these people from Billiter Square,—with whom, on his brother’s account, he had been in frequent communication on account of presents forwarded to his wife, and the remittance of Charles’s allowance,—might come and wait upon *her*.”

Something of the spirit of Barrington of Hexholm seemed breaking out in him, as during his sojourn at Greensells and Heriford Castle! He appeared to remember that, disinherited or not, it behoved him to be a gentleman; and, though Maria would far rather have betaken herself and her miserable baggage to the inn in Holborn, and the open-hearted counsels of her cousin Cornbury, she was too habitually submissive to demur.

When her uncle, in an effusion of liberality hard to account for, offered the loan of twenty pounds for present use (which, as he grumblingly observed, in order to keep up the malicious farce of threatened litigation, he could repay himself on balancing their accounts in March), she thankfully accepted it, that she might repair the seeming niggardliness of her adieus in the village; and her final parting from her good aunt was cheered by the hope that she might henceforward obtain for her ailments the best medical advice, and secure to the remainder of her days the comforts which had attended her youth.

So confused was Maria’s notion of her new rights, that she had not disentangled from the maze of law terms perplexing the will, whether her claim to the overgrown fortune bequeathed her were absolute and immediate; and, above all, whether her cousin’s name were mentioned, and his present allowance secured. And as she had already

preferred a petition to her uncle through his wife, that the subject of the inheritance should not be broached between them till he had seen his lawyer, and satisfied himself concerning the validity of the will, it was impossible to ask for a second perusal of the copy she had placed in his keeping.

She was, consequently, almost as impatient as himself for their arrival in town; and scarcely were they installed in their hotel, when she begged permission to despatch a letter to Mr. Fitzhugh, the partner of the firm to which she was referred as her late uncle's correspondent and friend.

In a surly voice, Mr. Barrington set forth, that "London had hours and customs to be respected, as well as the country; and that the gentleman who would be at her orders the following morning in Billiter Square, was sacred from intrusion as majesty itself, when installed for the evening at his mansion in Portland Place." He advised her, therefore, to retire early to rest, after a day so fatiguing. "On the morrow he would proceed into the City, and probably bring back Mr. Fitzhugh."

All this did not prevent him, however, from proceeding to the private residence of his own solicitor, the moment his niece, obeying a suggestion so much like a command, retired, after dinner, to her chamber; where the awkward country-girl whom Mrs. Barrington had kindly insisted should attend her, was in waiting,—her eyebrows arched to the elevation of Green-park gateway from amazement at the profusion of light, warmth, furniture, eating and drinking of the palace called a London hotel, so much at variance with her experience of her father's cottage and the miserliness of Easton Hoo.

Had not Maria's bewildered reveries, comprehending such a complication of future, present, and past, as scarcely ever distracted a female brain, been indulged while seated unconsciously before her toilet-glass, instead of in the sitting-room (on the table of which her uncle flung his best waterproof hat on his return, as regardless as though it were the worst of his three memorable straws), she would have discerned in a moment that her rights were unimpugnable, and that the will was as good as though the Lord Chancellor himself had made it. But she continued to muse on, in

uncertainty; now, fancying herself the fountain-head of good to thousands; now, a miserable domestic slave still crouching under the lash of Easton Hoo; while her uncle was pacing the drawing-room with curses upon his lips, declaring himself a victim to the injustice of Providence and the malignity of his nearest of kin.

For if Maria had insolently obtruded herself on his brother's attention, so as to produce his ridiculous proposition of uniting her with her cousin, and, in the sequel, endow her with his whole fortune, it was doubtless as the cunning suggestion of her aunt. Without Mrs. Barrington's advice and assistance she would not have dared to write! Mrs. Barrington was instigated, not alone by the conjugal hatred inherent in woman, but the desire of enriching one over whose simple mind she had more influence than over husband or son. "Yes! he saw through it all."

In the bitterness of his disappointment, he was almost pleased that it would be shared by Charles!

"The woman, if she despised him, *did* care for her son; and when Mrs. Barrington found that, thanks to her machinations, his name was not so much as mentioned in the will, and that the poor fellow would stand in the Heriford family exposed as a liar and impostor, perhaps she would repent what she had done. Charles might go whistle, now, for the continuance of his allowance! Meanly as he thought of Miss Brenton, he did not think there breathed so poor-spirited a woman as to waste her money upon a man who had rejected her; a man who, even had he not previously given his promise to another, would as soon have thought of proposing to Mary the housemaid, as of offering her his hand."

Mr. Barrington's exasperation was, in fact, not a little increased by a more deliberate examination of the will, under his lawyer's exposition. It appeared that Maria had not unlimited power over the property; that there was no hope of piquing her generous spirit into an act of restitution: nay, not so much as the poor perspective that Charles might become her heir! The whole was vested in the hands of trustees, for her life-enjoyment; and in case she should die unmarried, or married and childless, it was to be apportioned to charitable institutions at Madras. In

the event only of an heir of her body attaining the age of twenty-one, was she to become absolutely entitled.

All this was explained to herself on the morrow, not by her acrimonious uncle, but by the sensible and gentlemanly man who was to officiate as her trustee; and the tears that filled the eyes of Mr. Fitzhugh in alluding to the hard fate of his deceased friend, bespoke at once the confidence of his young ward.

On *his* part, no sooner had he perceived by the nature of her replies to his proposals about minor arrangements connected with the proving of the will, that, in addition to sensibility of heart, she possessed equity and intelligence of mind, than he proposed submitting to her the whole of his correspondence with the late Mr. Humphrey Barrington during the last twelve months.

“I ask your attention to these letters,” said he, “not only to give you a just estimation of the character of him to whom you are so greatly indebted, and whom you were fated never to know; but to acquaint you with his exact views and plans with regard to the Hexholm estate. For their wisdom sake, you will hardly fail to adopt them; even if uninstitigated by respect towards the memory of my poor friend.”

Maria felt a little embarrassed that, in these allusions and others more circumstantial to her assumption of the family name and residence at the family place, Mr. Fitzhugh testified no more deference to the presence of her sullen uncle than if he had been one of the fire-screens. The trustee probably hoped, since his own delicacy did not prompt Mr. Barrington to absent himself from the interview, to drive him from the room by unceremonious allusions. The truth was, that, having lived at Madras on terms of brotherly intimacy with Humphrey, at the period of what the elder brother called his “misfortunes,” and everybody else his “misconduct,” circumstances had come to the knowledge of Mr. Fitzhugh, not alone justifying his brother’s disposal of his property in another quarter, but strongly disinclining him to the smallest communication with the offender.

“That, after perusing your uncle’s letters, you will make up your mind to reside at Hexholm,” said he, addressing his

ward, "I cannot doubt, even if such were not your previous intention. You would scarcely believe the devoted attachment of my poor friend to the roof under which he drew breath. Persons driven to early exile in India experience for the word Home a kind of religious worship. My own experience enables me to understand the passion of your uncle for the threshold on which he received the parting kiss of his mother,—the woods where he used to go bird's-nesting,—the church where his parents were buried. When apprised that all this had passed into the hands of strangers, his mortification amounted to anguish. The family changes with which the circumstance was connected, were, in fact, the means of keeping him in India many years beyond his original intention. But that at length he was enabled to repurchase Hexholm, I doubt whether he would have returned to England at all: knowing which, I left no stone unturned to secure what I trusted would restore me my friend."

"It was by *you*, then," inquired Maria, trusting that her uncle, who, after his usual praiseworthy custom, was drumming against the window, was *really* occupied with what was passing in the street, "it was by *you* the purchase was made?"

"By me,—and not I can assure you, without a hard tug with the limb of the law who had got it into his clutches; and who, having bought it as an investment and not as a residence, was exhausting the estate by his ignorance, and letting the house fall to ruins. You will not, however, I trust, find much fault with the present condition of the latter; and the former is in fair training. Nor will *you* grieve over the havoc of the axe, as my poor friend would have done; since you never beheld the glorious old oaks and beeches swept away by the interregnant; of which poor Humphrey used to talk in India, with as much devotion as of the cedars of Lebanon!"

"I long to see the place!" rejoined Maria. "In my childhood, it was my poor mother's dearest delight to talk of Hexholm. There are parts of the gardens to which, I am convinced, I could find my way without a guide."

"I hope with all my heart, that, in my zeal for improvement, I may not have laid a sacrilegious hand upon them!"

rejoined Mr. Fitzhugh, with a smile. "But I think I can promise you *not*. My poor dear friend's prepossessions were too well known to me to run the risk, as Pope says, of grubbing up an old post that he remembered when a child."

So long and so earnestly did he talk of the spot, to which (in warmth of friendship for him whom he was to see no more), he had been devoting so much time and attention, that, by degrees, even the interest of Maria was too much excited to bear in mind the presence of one of whom Hexholm was the inherited home. She literally forgot that what was now hers, had once been her uncle's.

It was soon arranged that Mr. Fitzhugh was to accompany her into Durham as soon as he had gone through the preliminaries of proving the will, of which the original was in his hands.

"Ten days, at least, will be requisite for all we have to get through," said he, "for the formalities of Doctors' Commons are the most formal in the world. Meantime, my dear young lady, I shall ask your permission to bring my wife to wait upon you, who will answer more questions about your poor uncle and cousins than you may perhaps like to ask of an old fellow like myself. Those poor girls were constantly with her at Madras. I trust their cousin will not be less so, in London."

This offer was so frankly made, that Maria did not hesitate to admit how great a comfort would be to her the protection of some female acquaintance. She had no friends in London. Even the effort of ordering mourning seemed unaccomplishable.

"She should be thankful for the advice and assistance of Mrs. Fitzhugh."

"My carriage is at the door," said he, instantly meeting her wishes halfway. "It will save us a world of talking, if you will get into it, and accompany me to Portland Place. At this hour, we are sure of finding my wife, who presides at the children's dinner. Meanwhile, as an essential preliminary to shopping, here is a cheque-book, for which I have already opened an account in your name with my banker. Till matters can be definitively settled between us, you have a credit there of two thousand pounds."

The deadly ire fermenting in the breast of Mr. Barrington, while hearing his house and lands discussed, in detail, as the property of another,—how the range of stabling he had built for his racers had been pulled down as an eyesore, and a new entrance he had made been closed up, and the old gateway restored, now reached its *acmé*. To lie vanquished on the earth, and find the prancing warhorses of the enemy planting their feet upon his prostrate form! To have sunk into nothing, and find the poor needy girl to whom he had grudged an end of candle, and to whom he had denied almost the free enjoyment of the light of day, become, as by a supernatural transformation, rich,—powerful,—envied,—free! While he still kept up the rat-tat-too upon the window which was the habitual outlet of his nervous irritation, and heard her successively consulted about her farms, her woods, her mines, with thousands of pounds assigned her as pocket money,—her, to whom but two days before, he had refused the loan of a five-pound note,—such a flood of venomous envy was raging in his heart, that, instead of contenting himself with staring out of the window, it was wonderful he did not throw himself head-foremost into the street!

For it was not alone that this beautiful Hexholm, of which they spake as unconcernedly before him as if it had descended straight to Maria from her grandfather, and he had never reigned over its acres or sacrificed them to his fatal pursuits, had been a second time lost to him by his want of favour in his brother's sight. All the injustice of Humphrey towards him might have been repaired, had he not so sedulously forestalled the possibility of a marriage between Charles and Maria. The dread of such an event had been for years a sort of nightmare to him. He had threatened his son with disinheritance, if he showed so much as common courtesy to his cousin. And what was the result? That he had an insolent and expensive daughter-in-law, whose discontents would break forth now that she found her husband stripped, by his uncle's death, of all his hopes, and the moiety of his means;—whereas, the gentle creature who was at that moment driving from the door in Mr. Fitzhugh's carriage, on her way to the creation of new

connexions and the enjoyment of unhopèd-for pleasures, would have placed him once more at the head of the family estate, with an income of twelve thousand a-year !

How was Charles ever to forgive him ! How was he ever to forgive himself !

CHAPTER XXII.

The greeting kiss, the tender, trustful talk,
 Arm linked in arm, the dear familiar walk,
 The sweet domestic interchange of cares,
 Memories and hopes,—this union was not theirs !

MORTAYNE MANOR was what ladies'-maids and young ladies in their teens call "a sweet place." Situated at the entrance of a mountain gorge opening upon Windermere,—embosomed in woods, through which the vistas towards the lake were numerous and varied,—the manor, which was built with the materials and within a stone's throw of the ruins of the ancient Abbey of Mortayne, to which the estate was annexed, never failed to recall to its visitors the often-repeated saying, that the monks of old took care to provide themselves with pleasant quarters. Fish, flesh, and game were lavishly provided by the lands which afforded to the eye a banquet as rich as to the palate.

At the Reformation, the goods and chattels of the old religious house had fallen to the share of Sir Guy de Wilton, whose son was created, in the reign following, Baron of Mortayne ; the poor monks, expelled from their venerable domicile, having sought refuge, it was said, in the old fortress of Mortain, from whence they had originally emigrated, in the time of Henry I., by one of whose grandsons the county, or earldom, was enjoyed.

For several centuries following, the Mortaynes, who possessed fairer manors in the South, had left their stewards to reside in the rambling grange into which a portion of the ruins were converted. But, during the early part of the reign of George III., when building was the mania in vogue,

so that even the king could not leave even the frightful domain of Kew, full fronting the still more frightful town of Brentford, without its castle, the father of the present peer, on being informed that the steward's residence was no longer tenatable, and that a new house must be constructed, decided, on visiting the spot, and becoming instantly affected by the *malaria* or mania for the picturesque, which besets all persons newly arriving in the district of the Lakes, (very speedily to subside again, as certain wines produce the most rapid but shortest intoxication), that, instead of building a house for his steward, he would build a residence there for himself;—not a castle,—not a *palazzo*,—but a *piéd-à-terre*; the *piéd-à-terre* of a noble lord consisting, of course, of three stories, with a suite of noble apartments, and spare bed-rooms without end. The ruins of the old abbey, and the oaks of the domain, would have supplied materials on the spot for a Greensells or Heriford Castle; and it was, consequently, some proof of moderation on the part of the late lord, that he contented himself with setting up a villa, instead of laying the foundations of a Versailles.

Though most people who visited the place, which retained the name it had worn ever since it ceased to be an abbey, were of opinion that nothing could exceed the charm of contrast between the beautiful new Ionic structure, as white as Wyatt and Bernasconi could make it, and the grim ruins, overgrown with ivy, of that portion of the ancient pile which had been left untouched, a few cried out against the modern erection, as a vandalism out of keeping with the genius of the spot.

Neither Wyatt, however, nor William—ninth Lord Mortayne—could do much to injure the beauty of the surrounding landscape; which was such as would have made Claude Lorraine or Salvator throw aside their brushes in despair.

When the present Lord Mortayne succeeded to his title, by the death of his father during his infancy, the earliest years of his life were spent with his widowed mother at the Manor; and though, from the period of her death, soon after he went to Eton, he saw the place no more till he attained to man's estate, it possessed, in his memory, all the charm of youthful association. When forced, by the results of his vicious pleasures, to dispose of a portion of his pro-

perty, he had expressly exempted Mortayne. His park in Sussex cost him hardly a sigh; but he could not have borne to part with the place from which he derived his title, and the holiest reminiscences of his life. Amidst all his dissipations, the fashionable *roué* had never wavered in this all but religious love. It is true the sporting at Mortayne was far from despicable; but the autumnal visits of the young lord were quite as much dedicated to his *lares* and *penates*, as to his otter hounds or pheasants. He usually came accompanied by a chosen few,—Lady Susan Spilsby and her husband; Bowbridge, Greville, Hildyard, and a few others, who were good enough to content themselves with bachelor's fare, (when served by a first-rate French cook); and from that epoch, and throughout the period of his Eastern pilgrimage, nothing had been done to the deserted place, till the day on which he visited it with the hope of converting it into a temple worthy of the divinity who had pledged herself to be his.

Alarmed to perceive how far what had always been cited as one of the most perfect bachelor's residences in the kingdom fell short of what he could desire to offer to his wife, Lord Mortayne resolved to effect as few changes as possible, till the taste of Eleanor could preside over their progress. Where was the use of converting it into what she might dislike? All, therefore, was left as it used to be during the triumph of those *roué* conclaves, where all that was best of what is worst in London was assembled at Mortayne Manor.

The hall, fitted up as a tent, and ornamented with trophies of curious arms, still, therefore, served for dining-room; while another chamber of the suite was adorned with curious heads of deer, foxes, and other products of the chase. Engravings, after the least chaste of the old masters, were hung in several of the bed-rooms; and no one could accuse Lord Mortayne of prudery in the selection of several exquisite pieces of sculpture, gracing the hall and vestibule, which from time to time he had sent home, when visiting the Continent. Strong evidence, in short, was perceptible on all sides, that the owner of that charming house had never contemplated the matrimonial estate.

It was not this, however, which produced the disgust with which it was contemplated by the lovely bride. Though warned of its deficiencies, Eleanor had been unable to divest

herself of the idea that the residence of a peer of the realm *must* be on a grander scale than that of a country baronet, like her father; and when she saw how much poor Wolsley Hall gained by comparison with a villa that would have done honour to the environs of Richmond Hill or the *Bois de Boulogne*, she took no further heed of the grandeur of the mountain scenery, or the pastoral beauty of the adjoining lake. There needed only the presence of a Lady Alicia, by way of confederate, to render her as supercilious as she had shown herself at Easton Hoo. But she dared not. The high-bred presence of Mortayne imposed upon her. The authority of a husband alarmed her. But her scorn was not the less bitter for being compassed within the secrecy of her heart.

The nature of her sentiments passed unobserved of Mortayne. He was too passionately and absorbingly in love, to ascribe the changes of the countenance, in which his soul found its joy, to any other cause than indisposition. When he saw it suddenly fall, on drawing up upon the gravel of a sweep where their four horses found themselves a little embarrassed, he decided that she was suffering from the asperity of the northern atmosphere.

"That dreadful climate! If, after all, it should prove too severe for her! It had never agreed with his poor mother."

This observation was laid up by Eleanor in her armoury of defensive weapons. Nor was she sorry to hear her fit of the spleen ascribed to the cold; or to see the grate piled up with logs to the endangerment of the safety of the poor villa, by way of curing by warmth her momentary chagrin.

For momentary it was. Impossible to persist in an ungracious sentiment of any kind while made the object of such obsequious idolatry on the part of her husband! She was at present in the enjoyment of all the influence commanded by youth and beauty. His sunshine was in her face; his life was in her heart.

It was difficult not to affect interest, nay even to feel it, in the objects around, which he seemed to prize so highly. Of each of the pictures, if of moderate merit, he was able to enhance the charm by some piquant family anecdote, or history of the mode in which it came into his possession; or some blunder of which it had been the origin on the part of

his *roué* guests of former years. Not a carabine, not a pair of antique pistols,—not a Turkish yataghan,—not a Malay krees suspended to the trophies of arms upon the wall, but had its story. And how charming are such stories, when told by eloquent lips, and heard for the first time!

In the course of four-and-twenty hours, though her rooms were hung with simple chintz in place of the gorgeous tissues she had pictured to herself, though the carpets did not rival the *haute lice* of Greensells, or the Worcester china the Sèvres on which her eyes had expected to luxuriate, she looked round with pleasure on objects that seemed instinct with life-like and pleasurable reminiscences.

But when Lord Mortayne at last permitted her to leave the house, where he followed every step she took with the idolizing looks of a mother whose first-born is just launched upon its feet, there was no need for his bride to feign enthusiasm. The grounds of her new home were precisely such as she had never seen and never dreamed of. Her life having been spent in an inland county without so much as a journey to the coast—the only Great British pastime to which Sir John Maitland could never be induced to give his support—the very crags that started forth in the plantations like Dryads peeping from the shade in an ancient picture, excited her interest. Higher in the woods, bold promontories of rock afforded stronger features to the landscape; and on approaching nearer, the tremendous roar that assailed the ear was amply atoned for, when a turn of the path brought in view the glorious mountain-torrent bursting impetuously over its ledge of rock, and breaking into foam and fury in the basin worn at its base; from whence the enfranchised waters went leaping down to the lake,—now, concealed by huge embankments of fractured granite,—now, flowing like limpid crystal in their gravelly channel, and brightening by a thousand lesser falls the darkness of the wood, amid which, their foam and spray seemed like the haunting of fairies.

“I was sure this place would charm you!” said he, fondly pressing her arm to his side as they stood together by the margin of the basin, where long leaves of hartstongue, streaming from the interstices of the moss-grown stones into the foaming waters below, were vivified, even at that

sunless season, by the perpetual spray. "I was sure you would be delighted with Mortayne. It is neither perched in the clouds, like Heriford, nor swamped in a morass, like Greensells; but a snug and cosy nook, such as assimilates well with the name of home."

Lady Mortayne endeavoured to infuse an expression of sympathy into the blue eyes into which he was intently gazing, while *they* gazed as intently on the beautiful waterfall, whose spray was tinted with rainbow hues by the gleam of the wintry sun. She wished he had not invalidated the genuine pleasure of the moment by allusions to Heriford and Greensells, places associated in her memory only with mortification and regret.

As they returned home, in pointing out to her with enthusiasm several beautiful points of view, comprehending the august head of Langdale Pike, the purple horizon of woods fringing his domain, and the fair shrubberies which formed the *pleasaunce* of the Manor, he could not forbear connecting them with traits of character exhibited by former guests of note, or stories which, though commencing with "I am afraid I ought not to tell you," were told to the end. The follies of Lady Susan Spilsby and the affectations of touring marchionesses were related, lest she should find her promenade dull! As if the *tête-à-tête* wanderings of a bride with the husband of her choice, in a spot that deserved to be dear to both, could stand in need of enlivenment!

"His mind seems to contain no faculty but memory!" was Lady Mortayne's impatient reflection when that evening she retired to her beautiful dressing-room (the only room in the house which had been restored with all the elaboration of modern luxury, to greet its new divinity) after spending the evening as before, in listening to sparkling reminiscences and tales of wilder days. "He seems to live only in the past! Can he not see that my limited experience affords me nothing to tell in return? Or does he wish to humiliate me by the contrast between *his* brilliant career and the dull monotony of my existence? Surely, it is time he should discover that we are about to recommence life together; and that there may be satisfaction in looking forward as well as in looking back!"

On the morrow, however, it was so pleasant to sally forth with him, on the steady pony which formed in that wild country the only safe substitute for the beautiful barb given her by her brother, the produce of the Wolseley stud, which was fretting in its stall without much chance of being used, to visit a few of the beautiful mountain-passes in the neighbourhood, that she forgot her weariness of the night before. It was not exactly thus she had intended to make her appearance in public, as a peeress. She languished a little after the prancing Arabian and its ornamental bridle, and the attendants in the livery of her house, which had constituted the charm of the Heriford Castle expeditions. But Mortayne, in his eastern travels, had so divested himself of all taste for parade, and was not alone so sworn an enemy to pomp and show but so desirous to ride unobserved by her side, with his hand resting on the pommel of her saddle and his words of tenderness secure from the curious ear and scoffing tongue of a menial, that he chose to ride unaccompanied. "With such a pony there needed no attendance. She could jump upon it without aid; and was he not always there to supply the place of the most attentive of servants?"

In the beauty of the mountain scenery she soon lost sight of her apprehension that in traversing Ambleside they might "meet some of their neighbours, and be laughed at for their odd-looking set-out;" and though somewhat startled by his assurance, that at *that* season of the year they had no neighbours of a class to make their observations a matter of the smallest moment, the keenness of the mountain air soon braced up her nerves.

"What a glorious scene this must present in summer!" cried Eleanor, as they surveyed from the craggy height the bright expanse of the lake below. "Oh! how I wish that summer were come."

Lord Mortayne wished so too; for, between, lay the intervening gulf of the season, of which he could not think without dread and disgust. What, *what* would become of his dreams of domestic happiness, if, when the novelty of the manor and its lovely environs was worn off, he saw her spirits flag, and her bright face overcast!

Already she was beginning to ask for the London papers, which, for the first three or four days after her arrival, had been overlooked.

"Did he only take in the *Times*? The *Times* was such a dull paper!"

"Rather say that it is not a lady's paper," said he, with a smile of wonder at so singular an accusation.

And instantly sitting down, he wrote orders to Houghton for a daily paper in better accordance with the tastes of his bride. "The *Morning Post* and *Court Journal* would afford her intelligence of her fashionable friends."

It was, perhaps, in pursuance of her example, that, on the first evening of their arrival from town, instead of sitting as usual by the side of his adored Eleanor with her small hand clasped in his, and their eyes fixed upon the blazing logs while he indulged in his narrative vein, Lord Mortayne drew towards the reading lamp, and began skimming the columns of the fashionable journals.

His wife, whose eye had been attracted by the announcement of her own "Marriage in High Life," after the perusal of which she fell into a fit of musing over the paper that drooped from her listless hand, was struck, even in her somewhat gloomy reverie, by his sudden exclamation of—"By Jove! what luck!"

"For us?" demanded Eleanor, who seemed to feel, just then, that they were somewhat in want of luck.

"No! for Lady Alicia Barrington. That bumpkin, whose son she married, is come into an enormous fortune!"

And forthwith he proceeded to read aloud the paragraph, extracted from the Madras paper, which, in announcing poor Humphrey's death, stated his sole surviving relative and heir to be Giles Barrington, Esq., of Easton Hoo, in the county of Bucks.

Unable to utter a syllable, Lady Mortayne felt as though the measure of her mortifications were complete.

"I remember Lady Heriford telling me, when I expressed some surprise at the match," resumed Mortayne, "that young Barrington had great expectations from an uncle in India, at whose cost he had been brought up. Alicia de Capell had scarcely generosity of character enough to marry for love; but I know no one better qualified to

disperse a large fortune. Alicia is plain—but high-bred and clever, and I have no doubt she will make a tremendous figure in London next season. She is just the sort of *intrigante* to become a woman of considerable influence.”

At the word “influence,” an involuntary glance round the quiet drawing-room, dimly lighted by shaded lamps, produced a cold shudder in the frame of Eleanor. With the heart of the man who addressed her, she experienced no more warmth of sympathy than with the gilded time-piece ticking on the chimney-piece! And *such* was the result of her cruel trifling with the feelings of Charles Barrington! Such was the close of the delusive visions in which she had indulged as a *débutante*!

CHAPTER XXIII.

Par la révolution, Versailles s'est fondu dans la nation ; Paris est devenu l'œil de bœuf. Tout le monde fait sa cour ; c'est le génie de la France, où on tient école de l'art de plaire. L'Anglais navigue,—l'Arabe pille,—le Grec se bat pour être libre. Le Français fait la révérence!—PAUL LOUIS COURIER.

“AY, ruin yourself by acts of kindness towards other people! Be eaten out of house and home by your poor relations!” exclaimed Mr. Barrington to his wife, when seated once more beside the smouldering fire at Easton on his return from town. “The first thing they will do, on being able to dispense with your aid, is to snap their fingers in your face, and send you to the devil!”

Such was the outbreak of his impotent rage at finding a temporary home afforded to Miss Barrington by her worthy guardian ; in order that, in company with Mr. Fitzhugh, she might pursue those measures at the Heralds' Office and Doctors' Commons, which were to place her in legal possession of her property previous to their departure for the north.

“In Maria's unprotected situation, surely she is fortunate to have obtained the friendship of people like the

Fitzhughs,—her uncle's nearest friends?"—pleaded his wife.

"What do you mean, ma'am, by her unprotected situation? Where has she been abiding for the last seven years? To whom did her mother intrust her on her death-bed? Whose bread has she been eating?" cried Mr. Barrington, unable to contain himself. "Don't talk to *me* about 'unprotected!'—My care of her has been one of the greatest plagues of my harassed life!"

His wife was at once too weak and too wise to attempt to convince the wolf that the lamb had not eaten up his grandfather. Better allow him to howl out his chapter of grievances! *She* knew that, so far from being ungrateful, the heart of Maria was tenderness itself, even to those who had trampled on her; and fully coincided in her niece's opinion, that, at present, it was impossible for herself and her disappointed uncle to dwell together in peace. A time would come, she hoped, for more charitable feelings on the part of her angry kinsman. Meanwhile a thousand tokens of fond and thoughtful remembrance had been already despatched to her kind aunt, by the Mary whom she had replaced by a suitable attendant,—not as too clumsy to wait upon her in her altered fortunes, but from knowing her services to be indispensable to Mrs. Barrington.

Some allowance was to be made for the exasperation of the shabby master of Easton. A milder man might have been irritated at finding that what he had alienated as an unfertile acre of land proved to contain a gold mine; and it was not without pity that his wife contemplated the workings of his rage, and listened to his preposterous accusations against her of not having promoted a nearer connexion between his son and niece.

"I objected to it," said he, with the audacity produced by security of non-contradiction, "because unaware that there existed an attachment on either side. But had you confided to me, what I have not the least doubt you wrote to my brother Humphrey (or he never would have taken into his head the strange crotchet of making them man and wife), I should have withdrawn my objections; and, at this moment, Charles would have been in the undisturbed enjoyment of twelve thousand a year. I shall like to hear

what *he* will say when he learns how he has been defrauded!"

What Charles had to say, *in the interval* of learning the great event in the family, was, however, anything but what his father liked to hear. On the day following Mr. Barrington's return from town, while he was still swearing away his soul in irritation by way of relieving the dulness produced in the house by the loss of the linnet which, though its cage was dreary and food scanty, imparted cheerfulness by its notes, in the midst of the abuse he was lavishing upon his wife for not being well enough to get up and make his breakfast, and for fretting after her year-nay companion,—a letter from his son was placed in his hands.

The commotion that followed was such as almost to induce the poor invalid to pray that no more letters might ever reach Easton Hoo! The consequences of the two last had nearly shaken her into her grave!

Yet there was nothing *very* criminal in the request contained in young Barrington's letter. He merely applied to his father for the means of getting into Parliament! Not for the cost of a contested election. Not for even the secret purchase-money of a government borough. He was in want only of the few hundred pounds, indispensable to wet the whistles of the honourable burgesses of Lord Heriford's good town of Rattleford, while doing him the honour to return him, scot free, on the family interest, as the honoured representative of the borough.

The retirement into private life of Sir Rupert Catapult, on the strength of a third paralytic stroke, being hourly impending, the noble family into which young Barrington was now interpolated had determined that Lord Henry de Capell should undertake the representation of Rattleford, when his elder brother came to be honoured with that of the county of Bucks; from which, the death of his father would probably soon translate him to represent the barony of De Capell in the Upper House.

Lord Henry, however, whose naturally feeble constitution was broken by premature excess, considered the delicate state of his lungs a sufficient plea against submitting to what he regarded as slavery little short of the hulks; and,

while assuring his lady mother, by whom such matters were now regulated in the family, that the late hours and foul atmosphere of the House of Commons would complete what later hours and hotter rooms had begun, so as to send him to an early grave, he suggested that a stouter representative of Rattleford was readily to be found, within the limits of their family circle.

"Alicia's husband, my dear mother," said he, "possesses the constitution of a horse, and far from the understanding of an ass. He is of our own way of thinking. As Clandon's brother-in-law, he would be peculiarly acceptable to his constituents;—and a seat in Parliament is the one thing wanting, to afford to Barrington a pedestal in the order of society into which he has found his way. The few who still wonder at his having obtained the hand of my father's daughter will have no further fault to find with him the moment he writes himself down M.P."

Lady Heriford was soon won over to this opinion;—not by her son, indeed, but by her mother, before whom, as usual, she laid the family dilemma.

"Henry would only expose himself in the House of Commons, as he does in most other places," was the stern decree of grandmama. "By giving time to the lees of his turbid mind to settle, he may perhaps discredit himself less in the Upper House, on the day (which GOD send may be a late one!) when he succeeds to my excellent son. Whereas young Barrington is aware that he cannot afford to play the fool, either in Parliament or out. Submitted, heart and soul, to the opinion of the world (a yoke galling only to those who are restive), he will understand the wisdom of doing himself credit."

An intimation to this effect was, accordingly, despatched to Paris—in a letter addressed not to Charles, but to his wife!—the marchioness having too fully enjoyed the prerogative of the gray mare, not to contribute, as far as she was able, in behalf of her posterity, towards the maintenance of the sovereignty of the petticoat.

"If Mr. Barrington, as I cannot doubt he will," wrote Lady Heriford, "eagerly embraces this opportunity of obtaining such a footing in public life as will materially forward his hopes of official employment, all lies smooth

before him. The cost of his election will not exceed a few hundred pounds."

And when Lady Alicia announced to her husband, with cheeks flushed with triumph, that "Papa was going to bring him into Parliament for their family borough," she added the supplemental *postscriptum* about the "few hundred pounds," with the careless ease of a person accustomed to hear thousands talked of by tens! A few hundred pounds was the sum subscribed by grandmama to the County Hospital, and by papa to all the new churches erected in his county. "A few hundred pounds" was a sum scarcely worth mentioning.

Her husband, however, whom the occurrence of Christmas so shortly after his marriage had compelled to book up certain outstanding debts, the fruit of former extravagance, to the amount of nearly six hundred pounds, and whose wedding presents to his bride were proportioned to her rank in life rather than to his means, felt the colour rise into his cheeks, as he reflected on the incompatibility of an immediate outlay of "the few hundreds" thus coolly cited (which, in election matters, usually exceeds half a dozen), with the wants of the ensuing half-year. Such a sum, extracted from such an income as theirs, was ruinous!

Instead, however, of frankly admitting the fact to one who, being bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, ought also to have been mind of his mind and purse of his purse, he expressed proper gratitude for the honour designed him; but reminded her, with an air as nearly sentimental as was in his power to assume, that his entrance into Parliament would cut short the continental tour they had taken so much pleasure in projecting.

"When we left England," said he, "old Catapult's death was expected from day to day. They talked of the cold water cure—a thing which, like extreme unction, announces the last extremity. And think how vexatious it would be, to be forced back to London a few weeks hence, when our friends here are starting for *les eaux*!"

"You surely do not imagine I preferred *les eaux* as an alternative with London?" cried Lady Alicia (who, though she wrote herself Barrington, still felt and spoke like Alicia de Capell). "Dread of the country alone instigated *my*

wish for the tour. Grandmama insisted so strongly upon the propriety of occasional visits to your father and mother, that the idea of that dreadful old tumble-down house at Easton haunted me like a nightmare!"

"I think you might have relied upon *me*," said Charles, proudly, "not to expose you to any annoyance of the kind."

"A tous les cœurs bien nés que la patrie est chère!"

rejoined Lady Alicia, shrugging her shoulders.

"How could I be sure that you might not yearn, now and then, after a peep at the halls of your ancestors?"

"The only visit I have paid to Easton, since I arrived at years of discretion, of my own free will," rejoined her husband, "was for the purpose of meeting yourself."

"*Accompagnée de plusieurs autres!*" retorted his wife. "Three parts of your heart were then with Eleanor Maitland. The quarter to which I gave no quarter was, at that time, all I had to boast of. But to talk of what is more to the purpose—Rattleford. If in Parliament, London becomes a matter of course, by which all my scruples are removed. No fear of Easton *then!* At the close of the session we may still proceed to the German baths."

Smiling an almost hysterical smile, Charles answered, slightly and vaguely, in the affirmative. For he knew these projects to be wholly incompatible with their means. A season in London, as Lady Alicia understood it, would absorb their year's income. Still, he stood too much in awe of the flighty sarcasms which she inflicted with as little concern as though the seeming sugar-plums did not contain arsenic and Prussic acid, not to shrink from the disclosure of his prudential motives. There was a certain curl of Lady Alicia's upper lip with which, having been already once or twice favoured, he would have been thankful to anybody who guaranteed him against seeing again.

A few hours afterwards, previous to proceeding to one of those dazzling Parisian balls which, in brilliancy of illumination and elegance of costume, approach nearest to the fabled *fêtes* of a fairy tale, the Barringtons made their appearance in the far-famed circle of Princess L——, a circle where it needs to be something, as well as somebody, to obtain even toleration.

In that arsenal of European diplomacy, where worn-out ministers are laid up, like the venerable Victory in Portsmouth Harbour—a mere hulk, but glorious from the halo of former triumphs, without disparagement to the lighter frigates in process of construction, whose future victories are predicted as they rise on the stocks—in that arsenal where piles of cannon-ball lie rusting, and cartridges and small-arms are amassed in anticipation of war, till there appears some danger of spontaneous combustion, or an explosion produced by some unguarded spark—Lady Alicia, admitted only by virtue of a letter of introduction, vouchsafed by Lord Mortayne (in whose case wit had been accepted as an apology for want of political influence), had hitherto felt somewhat *embarrassée de sa contenance*. She had not found courage to refrain from the weekly *soirées* of the ex-ambas-sadress, partly from the pride of being privileged to penetrate into a sanctuary from which the majority of her countrywomen, however high in rank, are excluded, but still more, from feeling that—born for the atmosphere of that ultra-exclusive temple of Conservatism—it was there the Machiavelic faculties of her brain would expand and ripen. The more than Jesuitical influence of high diplomacy was to *her* as the breath of life!—

To bait a hook with a sea-serpent's tail,
And sit upon a rock, and bob for whale,

was, in her ladyship's estimation, a far less gigantesque diversion, than to sit behind a rock, trolling in the stream of Time for kings and ministers. She could perfectly understand what must have been the sensations of her noble hostess on feeling a prince regent nibbling at her bait!

It was the first time in her life she had beheld Influence vested in a woman—such influence, *bien entendu*, as exacts courtiership from all who approach. In modern courts, courtiers are wisely abolished. The intrinsic value of these stately pieces of furniture made itself suspected at the first French revolution, and was determined by the second—the interest assigned them by the persecutions of the Reign of Terror having vanished with the poltroonery of the Three Days. But *l'art de faire sa cour* being, as asserted by Courier, inherent in every Frenchman, when legitimate op-

portunities are wanting he delights in the gratuitous exercise of the faculty.

Amazed, in the first instance, to perceive the possibility *de trôner sans être reine*, the instincts of Lady Alicia's ambitious nature thrilled within her while watching the graceful deference, the deprecation of word, look, and gesture, with which the bearers of the greatest names in France approached a footstool whose majesty was now but traditional.

The retort of Louis XVIII. to one to whom it was seldom given to be wounded by a retort, mechanically recurred to her mind.

"*Sire, je suis vieux,*" said Talleyrand wishing to deter from the Spanish war the king to whom, though of his own age, he could not say, "Sire, your majesty is too old."

"*Non, Monsieur de Talleyrand, vous n'êtes pas vieux, car l'ambition ne vieillit pas!*"

And never had the imperishable nature of ambition struck her as being more aptly illustrated than among the old courtiers of the aged Influence before her.

But however deeply imbued with the genius of the place, Lady Alicia felt inwardly humiliated by the consciousness that, at present, she had no right to form one of so august a conclave. Neither the daughter, sister, wife, nor mistress of a Minister of State, she was decidedly below par. The only triumph yet achieved by her talents for *finesse*,—that of having out-generalled a near kinswoman in the great struggle of her first love, and eclipsed one of the prettiest faces extant by one of the plainest, if a greater victory of cunning than to have forestalled the adhesion of some duodecimo Rhenish prince to the Zollverein, or to have impeded the progress of the Spanish courier by a skirmish on the frontier,—was not the species of manœuvre that counted in such a congress. The soul of a Mazarin might be within her; but she had not *fait ses preuves*.

Smarting under the sense of her own and her husband's insignificance, she accordingly felt more ashamed of him in a circle of ill-looking, ill-dressed individuals,—bald, snuffy, or spectacled,—the affixing of any of whose names to a treaty would have influenced the price of stocks, and in each of whose brains abided the elements of a revolution, or the still mightier power of its controlment,—than in those

brilliant saloons, where, according to continental custom, his want of precedence so often assigned her the lowest place.

But Lady Alicia had noticed that, in the Temple of Echo, wherein she was performing *Ko Too*, while an Irish peer was blackballed as of no account, certain English members of parliament, with whom, in London, Lord Heriford's daughter would not have been brought in closer contact than between the pit at the Opera and her box on the grand tier, were welcomed by acclamation. The value of their "most sweet voices" was perfectly understood by those to whom it is as essential to have an English majority in their sleeve, as a friend on the back-stairs of the Winter Palace, or a confederate concealed under the Divan; and who court distinguished people, not as lions, but as implements.

With innermost joy, therefore, though under the impassive mask of good breeding, when questioned with her usual half-listless, half-fretful inquisitiveness by her distinguished hostess, as to the object of her ball costume which announced some ulterior engagement, she adduced the *fête* of the Duchesse de R——.

"*Nous nous empressons, Madame*, said she, "*de boire à toutes les fontaines*, our stay in Paris being so limited. My husband is under the necessity of returning to England to take his seat in parliament."

From a momentary sparkle in the eye of the princess,—as in that of a veteran lion in his den at the sound of a distant conflict,—she saw that her object was attained. For the first time, the great tactician treated her with more than distant civility. She even condescended to look round and inquire for Mr. Barrington; and, on hearing from his wife that he had probably proceeded to the ball, where he had dancing engagements early in the evening, the princess, instead of being offended or disappointed, felt convinced that the new member had fled before the chance of being solicited for his support to a question which just then absorbed the interest of her political *clique*. That anybody, especially anybody arrayed in broad-cloth and double-milled kerseymere, could find her house and conversation a bore, was a thing as out of her calculation, as for a pope to fancy himself in peril of purgatory.

The husband, being for the moment unattainable, it might be as well to spread a little bird-line for the wife. When fixed upon the spray, it would be easy to determine whether her *ramage* were of higher quality than her *plumage*; the princess justly surmising, that the tall, plain, grave young ladyship who thought it worth while to neglect the noisy *fêtes* of Paris for her *soirées*, might have pretensions to be a superior woman.

Lady Alicia thus singled out, and placed on the *sellette* of the princess's *causeuse*, was neither surprised nor sorry to find herself instantly surrounded by the *courtisans* of the *reine du salon*.

Enchanted to be elected on any terms a member of the privileged circle, she exerted herself to exhibit powers of conversation, for which she had hitherto received little credit among those who measured her by her lace flounces and her husband's handsome face. She possessed, indeed, every qualification to distinguish herself in conversation. She was well-read and intelligent,—her manner was cold,—her head cooler,—her heart coldest of all. She was never the dupe of her own sentiments; and examined those of other people, ere she adopted them, with the flaw-seeking eye of a diamond-merchant.

This clear-sightedness was the more necessary, as her light was chiefly borrowed. Habituated to associat , at her father's house, with the most eminent men of the day, she copied *their* patterns, just as those of Eleanor Maitland's Parisian *canezous* were taken by her sister, Lady Mary.

At all events, she talked well enough to make the princess regret the approaching departure she announced; and to convince *herself* that, once settled in London in an establishment of her own, she might create a *bureau de politique*, rivalling the one whose *crachats* and *cordons* were displayed around her, and which she regarded as the Eden of modern civilization.

Charles Barrington, meanwhile, had deserted the field, not to be first in the ball-room of the Duchess de R——, but to indite, unsuspected and unobserved, an application to his father anent the representation of Rattleford, and the "few hundred pounds;" the receipt of which at Easton has been already laid before the reader.

On arriving at the *fete*, Lady Alicia looked vainly and indignantly around for him ; not from any personal feeling, but because aware that the *convenances* of Paris exact of a married couple, that, even if they never meet in private, they should appear together in public, and enter together the evening parties to which they are together invited.

“ How *could* you leave me at the Princess’s ? ” said her ladyship, in her harshest tones, when at length she descried him, standing in sublime meditation in the doorway of the whist-room. “ And, above all, why not tell me that you had other engagements to fulfil before you came here ? I would then have taken precautions against the mortification of entering the room alone. In a certain set of English people,—with whom, I trust, I have little in common,—it is thought, I believe, a clever thing to outrage the customs of the country in which you are residing. But with *mè*, ‘ à Rome comme à Rome,’ and, since you have determined to set all *bienséance* at defiance, I will never go out here again.”

One of Lady Alicia’s bitterest looks accompanied this *sortie*, which was, in fact, addressed less to his desertion of her at the Princess’s *soirée*, than to a peccadillo in which he had indulged two nights before ; her resentment whereof proved that she was not pleased to extend to *him* the proverbial license of “ à Rome comme à Rome.” It did not suit her that her husband should do as was done at Paris, when such doings led him to the *bal de l’Opéra* !

With a few old Oxford friends he had joined, a few nights before, a party to the *bal masqué* ; which, commencing at midnight, extends its festivities to an hour that nothing but the winter solstice prevents from being daylight ; and, accustomed to measure such diversions by the coarse excesses of a London masquerade, Lady Alicia regarded with unconcealed disgust this outbreak into bachelor dissipation ; not as a proof of conjugal slight, but as a symptom of *mauvais ton*.

A few hours after his return from what *she* considered an *orgie*, just as she was about to proceed to the English church, (for it is into the Sabbath-day these revels extend their tumultuous pleasures,) a note was placed in her hands, intended for the luckless Charles, who was still sleeping away his fatigues ; the handwriting and perfume of which betrayed

it to be from a woman, and, probably, not a lady. Too proud to pry into his secrets, particularly secrets of a nature such as she suspected, Lady Alicia ordered it to be placed by his bedside, and proceeded to her devotions; which, doubtless, borrowed little unction from the feelings festering in her heart against "*les suites d'un bal masqué.*"

A little more knowledge of Parisian life, and she would have been aware that the greatest and gravest, as well as the most dissolute, are among the frequenters of the *bal de l'Opéra*. A little more graciousness towards her husband, and the mystery of that pink note scented with *frangipane*, would have been cheerfully confided to her; and a mystery it was, which, as bitters or astringents reanimate exhausted nature, would have afforded twice as much excitement to her mind as even the promised seat in parliament.

Even the suggestions of her baffled curiosity, however,—even her resentment of his sins against *les convenances* of the caste over whom the forms of society exercise far stronger influence than the tables of the law, were overlooked in her eagerness concerning the accomplishment of the family project to afford him a seat in parliament. As the passive instrument of the future distinctions she trusted to acquire, he became of far more account in her eyes than as the admirer she had inveigled from the feet of the beautiful *débutante*.

What would have been her sensations,—what her exacerbation of temper,—could she have surmised that the ideal throne she was building for herself, was likely to lack a foundation, for want of a paltry, miserable "few hundred pounds!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

J'ai voulu peindre le mal que font éprouver, même aux cœurs arides, les souffrances qu'ils causent; et cette illusion qui les porte à se croire plus légers ou plus corrompus qu'ils ne le sont.—BENJAMIN CONSTANT.

OF the eventful months that ensued, let the results speak for themselves.

When Easter arrived, that equinox of the fashionable

year, most of the personages of our story, and above all, those who had protested loudest against joining in the pleasures of the London season, or who from circumstances, had regarded their chance of them as hopeless, were again settled in town. And, were the truth to be told at all times, how often would the fog-crested metropolis be apostrophized by its votaries with,

There is no living with thee, or without thee !

Among those most triumphant at setting foot once more within the magic circle, was Lady Mortayne, who fancied she had gained a point in conquering the antipathies of her husband, and at all events, accomplished her own in the success attending her *début* in matron life. At the drawing-room, where she was once more presented by the Marchioness of Heriford, the lovely bride was cited as the beauty of the day. Her new chariot was the prettiest equipage going ; the opera-box, which she shared with Lady Barbara Bernardo, one of the best in the house ; and, brightened in complexion and developed in form by country quietude, it would have been difficult to find a more brilliant specimen of truly English beauty.

It did not need the enhancement of her rich *trousseau*, or of the splendid diamonds presented to her by her brother, to attract the public gaze. Even if as simply attired as poor Maria on her first appearance at Greensells, every eye would have been riveted by the charm of her delicate features.

“ Just the wife for Morty ! ” and “ By Jove, Morty’s a lucky fellow ! ” was repeated by dozens of those thoughtless friends who, dazzled by the surface of things, trouble themselves with little beyond.

But, though greeted on his first appearance at White’s with congratulations still warmer than those which had attended his return from the East, certain of the Newbury juveniles, to whom neither his face nor his *bon mots* were as familiar as to the conscript fathers of the club, whispered to each other, when he was pointed out to them (elevating their eyebrows and depressing the corners of their mouths), “ *That* the husband of Eleanor Maitland ! ” or “ *That* the *sposo* of the beautiful Lady Mortayne ! ”

Even Lord Bowbridge, the man of all London who loved him best, and grasped him by the hand on seeing him, as though to save himself from drowning, was so struck by a certain air of concern which he noticed, or fancied he noticed, lurking in the gray depths of Morty's expressive eyes, that he could not forbear exclaiming—"By Jove, old fellow! I expected to see you looking as fresh as a four-year old."

Then checking himself, at the suggestion of a heart that was a trifle better than his head, lest Morty should be vexed by this implication of a want of bridegroom-like alacrity, he began to discuss the news and scandal of London;—anecdotes from the *coulisses* of the French theatre, nearly as dramatic as the scenes acted upon its stage; and stories about the *coryphées* of the ballet, which assigned to one or two of these little barefaced, bare-legged tags of female nature, more than the importance of a duchess.

Morty listened with a vague, inattentive face. He even heard, without an attempt at a bet, the state of the odds on the Derby; and without a smile, the account of Henry de Capell having threatened to call out any man who repeated the *sobriquet* anonymously bestowed on Meshech Bernardo, of "The honourable member *from* Coventry."

"*Apropos* to Bernardo," added he, "the Barringtons are in town. The Herifords have put that young fellow into parliament, by way, I suppose, of keeping him out of mischief; and they have a capital house, and do things in famous style. Thanks to a Parisian *toilette*, Alicia has come back looking almost handsome! Dress is nothing to a *pretty* woman; but it is amazing what it will do for an ugly one, particularly to a stick, like the lady in question, that will bear being crinolined and furbelowed."

"I thought her looking wonderfully well yesterday, at the drawing-room," replied Lord Mortayne. "But though no beauty, Lady Alicia had always *l'air distingué*, which I confess I almost prefer."

Lord Bowbridge, who had been puzzling in his mind what could have converted the once sparkling *Ai* of Morty's conversation into such decidedly still Champagne, now settled that he was disappointed in the effect produced at the said

drawing-room by his wife,—who was unquestionably less distinguished than pretty.

“I am beginning to think,” said he, cogitating aloud, with more frankness than discretion, “that, in point of looks, the brides, this year, have the best of it. Barrington is amazingly changed for the worse, by his season in Paris. I fancied Alicia would improve him; but a man loses as much as a woman gains, by Frenchifying his dress; and he is grown either solemn or out of spirits. Poor Charley is not half so good-looking a fellow as he was last season, when one used to see him running after El—after Lady Mortayne. Lady Alicia’s ugliness seems to have rubbed off upon him, and left the mark.”

“I should think the rubs of her temper more likely to have done the mischief!” observed Lord Mortayne. “Lady Alicia has all the cutting severity of old Lady Kilsythle, without the warmth of heart that delights in healing the wounds of her making.”

“Ay, I suppose that’s it!” rejoined Bowbridge. “You usually hit the right nail on the head, Morty. All I know is, that they don’t seem particularly on velvet.”

Mortayne was not sorry that the matrimonial grievances of other people should divert his kind-hearted friend’s attention from his own. For, notwithstanding the poems of triumph with which he chose to environ his arrival in town, his heart was heavy as lead. He was come of his own free will. But, while affecting to concede to the unexpressed wishes of his bride, for a house in town for the season, he dreaded only lest she should discover that he desired it a thousand times more than herself. So artfully had the *débutante* concealed the real nature of her sentiments, that he was afraid it would break the heart of his poor Eleanor should she ever surmise that her society and affection were insufficient to complete the measure of his happiness.

For a long time he had closed even his own eyes against the conviction. He had tried to attribute the weariness of his heart to indisposition, to the influence of change of climate,—to anything but *ennui*. He recalled to mind, fifty times a day, that he had committed an act of madness in commencing his experience of domestic life, in winter time, at a place like Mortayne,—where the hunting was

exactly of a nature to confine a Meltonian to the fireside. But at length, the eagerness with which he found himself counting the hours every day till post-time, that he might possess himself of his London letters and London papers, rendered it impossible to remain blind to the fact, that, however often he might repeat to his Eleanor the assurance that his earthly felicity was comprised within the ring-fence of home, there was a world elsewhere which supplied interests short of "felicity" perhaps, but far more exciting.

By degrees came the fatal discovery, that the perpetual sunshine of too long a honey-moon may become fatiguing to the eyes;—that he required a companion of wider experience and more comprehensive sympathies, than a mere girl;—that no real confidence can exist, between one whose thoughts are with the past, and another whose thoughts are with the future:—that the vistas of Hope and Memory lie in wholly opposite directions. Still, he had too much faith in the attachment of that youthful heart, wantonly to inflict the torture inevitable on discovering that its rich treasury of affections had been bestowed in vain.

"Let me, at least, avoid the crime of wasting her brilliant youth by shutting her up here, labouring to extract music from this old stringless spinnet of a heart!" mused the repentant husband. "In London, amid a host of friends of her own age, she will never find out that my attachment is less omnipotent than I fancied."

And when Eleanor, the moment she found the house in town a settled thing, affected to remind him of his own expressed desire to watch, among the beautiful woods of Mortayne, the gradual dawn of spring, and hail the first notes of the nightingale beside their happy home, he imprinted a long kiss upon her fair forehead, and hastened from her presence to indulge in feelings of compunction, at having so falsely miscalculated the purity of his tastes; and,—far worse,—of having sacrificed to the error a being so far more worthy than himself.

Lest his lovely wife should find leisure to participate in his discovery, he endeavoured, on arriving in town, to bewilder her eyes with jewels, equipages, and *fêtes*.

"She must not perceive that I love her less than at first.

She must not find out that she is wedded to one whose nature is so uncongenial with her own!" was his romantic idea; and, with all the chivalry of a noble character, he endeavoured to replace, by the gauds and pastimes of the world, the sympathy of which he fancied her defrauded.

Thus encouraged to the cultivation of all that was dear to her ambition, the *débutante* in matron life soon became as marked a figure on the glasses of the magic-lantern of fashion, as the girlish *débutante* of the preceding year. What more delightful to an ear like hers, than to have it whispered—"How beautiful Lady Mortayne is looking!—I no longer wonder at her having vanquished the Invincible!" or, "By Jove! Morty's wife is, out and out, the prettiest woman of the season. What diamonds and what eyes!—One can't help wondering which borrows their lustre from the other."

The spirited barb for which the craggy paths of Westmoreland had been too severe, was now again in request; and the day on which Mortayne officiated as escort in the park to the charming rider of whom the graceful animal appeared, by the playful arching of its neck, and perfection of its paces, to be so proud, was one of the brightest triumphs his vanity had ever tasted. But it was a triumph of *mere* vanity: and, after the ride had been once or twice repeated, he learned to understand the difference between accompanying another man's wife and his own; and why when in former days he rode by the side of Lady Susan Spilsby, poor Spilsby had seemed to think it so great a bore to skulk behind them, swallowing their dust; in company with Old Vassall, or any other of the established bores of the community, to whose companionship he was exposed by the ignominy of a second-class ticket.

It was insulting enough to find two saucy boys, like Lord Newbury and Lord Henry de Capell, assume a place on either side of Lady Mortayne, as coolly as though they were the legitimate supporters of her coat of arms; and above all, inexpressibly provoking, to catch only a syllable here and there of a conversation which, by the graciousness of her air and readiness of her mirth, she seemed to find so entertaining.

But Morty had been too facetious, in his time, upon the absurdity of jealous husbands, and wasted too much elo-

quence in demonstrating, like Don Juan, that these rash grumblers

Deserve the fate their fretting lips foretel,

to emulate the fault. If he found himself in a disagreeable position, he had no one to thank for it but himself. Had he not *forced* poor Eleanor to town, they should still have been enjoying their *tête-à-tête*, strolling in the lanes near Ambleside, on the shaggy pony and his favourite brown cob!

And yet, somehow or other, not even by comparison with the other animals, called Newbury and Henry de Capell, did these respectable quadrupeds recur temptingly to his mind's eye. The thought of Ambleside made him shudder. His ride in the park was at least preceded by a pleasant, gossiping half-hour at White's; and followed by some snug dinner-party; or Mario and Grisi in all their richest luxuriance of song—essential enjoyments to an essentially London man.

He would, perhaps, have felt disposed to delegate, now and then, to Sir Wolseley, the charge of his lovely equestrian—for to Sir Wolseley to ride in the front or rear rank, was immaterial;—nor would HIS good breeding have prevented his shaking off Old Vassall, like a viper into the fire. But Sir Wolseley, true to his resolution of eschewing “the humbug of London,” from the moment his sister was married, was gone salmon-fishing to Ireland; where, *soit dit en passant*, he never recalled to mind his penance in Rotten Row of the preceding season, without devoutly wishing his unfortunate brother-in-law well through his drill.

At length, an important question before the House of Lords, to which he had pledged himself to the noble friend by whom it was brought forward to give not only his support, but his attention, compelled Lord Mortayne to withdraw himself for some days from the field; on which, his wife entreated with such cheerful alacrity to be allowed to keep the house till he was again able to accompany her, that he could do no less than insist that she should join the riding party of her cousins the Ladies de Capell. He was too conscious of loathing his daily task, not to feel bound in conscience to secure this innocent diversion to the woman whom he compassionated as thrown away.

It was, consequently, no fault of hers that she found herself included in a group, wherein Charles Barrington was officiating as attendant upon his sisters-in-law. Lady Heriford who had more confidence in his discretion than that of his friend Henry, insisted that, whenever Clandon was engaged and the new member could obtain a respite from his parliamentary duties, he should ride with the girls; and happy were the Wednesdays and Saturdays when he was able to exchange the harsh voices of the House of Commons, for the prattle of the pretty lispers who talk nonsense as classically as though it were their mother tongue.

Nor were Lady Mary and Lady Blancho less delighted when they could engage their cousin Eleanor to become their *chaperon*; for, once more by the side of his idol of the preceding year, Charles Barrington took as little heed as they desired of their flirtations with the mad-cap parson and penniless *attaché*, who served as escort to themselves. No chanco of being reported to the marchioness, and, through her, to grandmama, so long as Lady Mortayne made herself so pleasant!

Had they taken a less selfish view of the matter, they would have discerned, perhaps, from these and other indications, that, between Lady Alicia and her husband, there existed no longer, or perhaps had never existed, the warmth of wedded love that effaces all preceding predilections, as a spring-tide sweeps away all trace of lighter objects scattered on the beach.

But Lady Alicia had been too domineering an elder sister to attach her family beyond the common instincts of nature; and when on the arrival of the Barringtons from Paris early in the month of March, it became clear to their friends that they had taken their *parti*, and that it was one strictly in accordance with a *mariage de convenance*,—*i. e.* mutual civility and mutual non-interference—their friends were satisfied to leave their arrangements undisturbed.

Even to themselves, the fashionable couple did not, perhaps, specify by the exhalations of what upas-tree their slender chance of happiness had been poisoned.—Though Lady Alicia was conscious of having projected her marriage to secure emancipation from a formal home encumbered with younger sisters—and though Charles was aware of

having proposed to Lord Heriford's daughter in the hopes of mortifying the jilt by whom he had been mortified—both had anticipated, in place of the passionate attachment of wedded life, at least, the perfect understanding cemented by good breeding and good sense.

But, the pink-paper note having afforded a signal for discord, the bonds of mutual forbearance which depended solely on promptings of expedience, became as the smoking flax when brought into contact with the influence of a haughty temper. Resenting, as an act of *lèse majesté*, her husband's appearance at the *bal masqué* in contradiction to her wishes, Lady Alicia was glad to seize upon the supposed *billet-doux* as a theme for displeasure, believing it to be the fruit of his *escapade*.

Unluckily while smarting under the sarcasms to which the incident gave rise, Charles Barrington was rash enough to observe that his lady-wife might have saved herself a world of vexation, if, instead of conjecturing the contents, she had used her conjugal privilege, and broken the seal of the suspected note. For a few days after the indiscreet sanction thus by implication accorded, a letter arrived during her husband's temporary absence, which had been forwarded from England by the Ambassador's bag; of which Lady Alicia had some pretext for tearing open the envelope.

The newspaper announcement of the heirship of Mr. Barrington to his rich brother had, that very morning, placed them in agonies of suspense. It was, in fact, to inquire at Galignani's concerning the origin of the paragraph that Charles had quitted the house; and, instead of prudently waiting his return, his wife, by her wild precipitation, obtained the first reading of the following agreeable epistle:—

“Easton Hoo, January 9th.

“DEAR CHARLES,—

“Your ridiculous application to me, of the 5th of this month, was prompted, I conclude, by the still more ridiculous statement of the newspapers, that I have inherited my brother's cursed fortune. For when, pray, did you ever know me with *a few* hundred pounds at my disposal, to make ducks and drakes of— or two hundred, or even one?

By this time, you are all the wiser; though, considering what you dinned into my ears concerning the generosity shown at your wedding by the old hag of a dowager, to whom, in return, you made me lose the Lord knows how many rubbers of half-crown whist, I cannot say you have made much proof of wisdom in having so squandered her gift as not to have wherewithal to pay for your new rattle. For, to a person like you, without either talent, or the sense to understand your want of it, Parliament *is* a rattle; and, if you take *my* advice, you'll set your mind on one less costly. Once for all, you have nothing further to expect from *me* till my death; and I promise you my constitution is a tough one. Meanwhile, as you have made your bed, you must lie in it. You have found out by this time, I suspect, that you had better have contented yourself with the wife that was waiting for you by my fireside, or, at all events, with the heiress you brought junketing over to Easton, instead of pretending to a ladyship—a proud minx, that took up with you only because she had outstayed her market—a faggot, good neither to sell nor burn. This is plain speaking; but, when I consider what you have missed, Charles, it is enough to make a man lose his patience.

“I suppose we shall have you over in England soon; in which case, no need of further correspondence on a disagreeable subject. For foreign postage comes heavy; and, between one expense and other, I have not a shilling I can call my own. Your mother is ailing, as usual, but sends her love with that of—

“Your affectionate father,
“G. BARRINGTON.”

Lady Alicia who, if harsh and an *intrigante*, was a high-bred gentlewoman, perused this epistle with feelings of unqualified disgust. To do her justice, her vexation at the discovery of her husband's disappointment as regarded his uncle's fortune, was secondary to her indignation at finding herself thus coarsely canvassed in his family, and, doubtless, with his knowledge and sanction, and a burst of passion ensued, that might almost have been mistaken for grief.

But to rage succeeded a panic of shame. She felt that there was no excuse for her having opened the letter. The

interception of fifty *billets-doux* would have committed her less in the eyes of her husband than to have perused the abusive epistle of his father. Never, *never* could he forgive the betrayal of his family penury to eyes like hers. By the feelings of aversion already engendered in her own heart, she could measure what would be the bitterness of *his*.

Two alternatives presented themselves to the world-governed mind of the delinquent:—she must either avow the truth, and brave to the utmost the upbraidings likely to ensue, even at the risk of forfeiting the new position which her fancy, stimulated in the school of Parisian *salonism*, painted as the supreme of happiness; or burn the letter, and attribute its destruction to accident, leaving him to obtain through some other channel the important intelligence it contained.

While deliberating with the letter still open in her hand, between the shame of a despicable action and the loss of her imaginary crown, her husband rushed into the room.

“You have a letter for me!” gasped he, his heart leaping with the agitation of such a chance as accession to a fortune of millions. “François tells me the embassy porter has been here with a letter.”

“You have just come in time to prevent my reading it,” said Lady Alicia, chilled to the soul by the sense of her own meanness, “for the suspense was getting too painful to be borne.”

“Has he made my father his heir?” cried her husband, snatching the open letter from her hands, blind, in the excitement of his feelings, to her offence in breaking the seal; and proceeding, without listening to her explanation, to decypher the letter. And it was almost sufficient penalty for Lady Alicia’s breach of faith to have to stand by, as if eager for information, while he perused, line by line, word by word, that tissue of gentlemanly abuse.

Impossible not to watch with tremulous interest for indications of the nature of his sentiments—was he so utterly engrossed by his disappointment concerning Humphrey Barrington’s will, as to be insensible to the taunts of his father, and the disgraceful epithets applied to herself?

“Ruined!—utterly, *utterly* ruined!” was all, however, that she could clearly understand of the mutterings amid

which he folded up the letter. And tho pang that arose in her heart at finding herself thus utterly disregarded overspread her cheeks with so deathly a paleness, that, when compelled to look her in the face, in order to explain with more coherence that the information of the newspapers was incorrect, her husband became impressed with the instant conviction that every word of the letter had met her eye!

Too horror-stricken by the idea of having his family disgraces exposed to the gibing of her sarcastic spirit to find words to upbraid her breach of trust, he quitted the room as abruptly as he had entered it.

But, even in that short interval a barrier, impassable as a mountain of ice, had sprung up between the husband and wife.

CHAPTER XXV.

C'est le sarcasme, c'est la froide moquerie qui blesse et qui outrage. L'amour propre consentirait à être blâmé ; mais il ne peut pas souffrir d'être raillé. Le blâme n'exclut pas l'estime ; il laisse la consolation de discuter, de contredire. La raillerie est l'expression irrévocable du dédain.—VILLEMAIN.

THE *tête-à-tête* dinner of that day put the self-possession of both parties severely to the test. Neither of them could look the other in the face. Since the days of our first parents, never was a human couple more thoroughly ashamed.

But when, in order to escape the *gêne* of each other's company, they proceeded to fulfil their usual evening's engagements, they were beset by new annoyances. The paragraph circulated by the London papers having been copied into *Galignani's Messenger*, half Paris was, by this time, apprised of their accession of fortune, and congratulations were lavished upon them on every side.

But, as if by tacit understanding, or rather by a mutual leaning towards deceit, both simultaneously replied, that "They knew nothing of the matter beyond what was reported by the public journals;"—a mode of reply which

sounded so like modest affirmation, that, at present, their augmentation of consequence experienced no drawback. Those accustomed to curtsy to Lady Alicia, accordingly curtsied to the ground; while an affectionate pressure of the hand was bestowed by many who had formerly extended only a finger. The *beau monde* was loud and unanimous in opinion, that the Barringtons were charming young people, who would do ample justice to their twenty thousand a year.

But while rumour was thus accomplishing her usual feats of exaggeration, the whole thoughts of Charles Barrington were engrossed by the health of Sir Rupert Catapult; whose retirement from the county of Bucks would be the means of irrevocably betraying to the Heriford family, and, through them, to the whole world, the shallowness of his resources and disappointment of his hopes.

Nor was Lady Alicia (now more keenly alive than ever to the necessity of assigning adventitious importance to a man so insignificant in social position as her husband), less distracted by her uncertainty concerning the state of his immediate supplies. To lose the opportunity of sitting for Rattleford for want of a few hundred pounds, would be *too* humiliating! But, though only a few days before, she would not have hesitated to inquire frankly the exact state of their ways and means,—conscious that her present anxiety arose from the perusal of the fatal letter, she dared not hazard a question that might possibly produce the rejoinder of “What reason have you to suppose that my funds are exhausted?—What reason have you to fancy that I could find difficulty in raising five hundred pounds? After all, then, you *did* read my father’s letter!”

The husband of Amina, in the Arabian Tale, could not have felt more guilty in her presence, after discovering her to be a Ghoul, than the great lady in her husband’s, after having ascertained him to be a beggar.

Some days afterwards, a communication from Lord Henry to his sister brought this awkward dilemma to a crisis.

“You are in such disgrace at Heriford Castle, my dear Alice,” wrote he, “that, having a commission to give

you for Privat (who has had the impudence to send me six dozen pair of gloves, my provision for the season, with silver buttons, such as I conclude were worn in the ark, instead of the patent ones which Boivin has made universal), I take the opportunity of advising you to intimate to the august authors of your being, of how many thousands a year you have come into the enjoyment.

“Grandmama has despatched to my mother, from Warleigh, one of her sternest addresses from the throne, reproaching *her* with your negligence. In short, they are magnanimously indignant at your leaving the *Morning Post* to acquaint them that my friend Charley has progressed into a Rothschild! At all events, you are bound to state whether this golden shower makes any alteration in Barrington’s intentions concerning Rattleford, which I must know by return of post.

“By the way, pray inform Privat, that in the next six dozen, half must be white and half *paille*; and tell him to write to me the week before they are forwarded, that I may have some shaving-soap sent from Lubin’s, to put in the parcel.”

“And what do you wish me to answer to all this?” inquired Lady Alicia of her husband, in whose hands, as the shortest way of dealing with the question, she had placed the letter.

“Surely you need not ask me! You are as well acquainted as myself with the state of the case!”

In this observation, the guilty conscience of Lady Alicia discerning only a bitter intimation of his discovery that the entire contents of his father’s letter had met her eye, she resolved to brave out what she had not arguments to extenuate.

“You intend, then,” was her haughty reply, “that the disastrous situation of our affairs shall be made known to my family? You wish *them* to understand that we are ruined, to afford them an opportunity of visiting upon you, some portion of the insults lavished by your father upon me and them?”

“As you please!” replied her husband, no less astounded by the tone she had suddenly assumed, than nettled by

having learned from Lord Henry's letter to how many false impressions he should be obliged to afford explanation. "Your better experience must of course suggest how far it may be wise to confide in their discretion."

In this observation, Lady Alicia descried a twofold taunt. The point, however, on which she was most sensible, was the "better experience," that seemed to allude to her superiority of age,—a point on which, since her arrival at Paris, she had been rendered painfully susceptible, by the sensation created by the personal advantages of her husband, in a spot where such distinctions are singularly wanting.

"My experience," she retorted, "suggests that in this case, as in all others, we cannot be too frank. You may, perhaps, find it somewhat late in the day to begin the task of candour with those who, whatever else may be their faults, are superior to the baseness of deceit. Neither they, nor I, have ever misled you. If I have neither youth nor beauty to recommend me, you knew it when you selected me for your wife. The peerage apprised you of my age,—your own eyes of the ugliness that seems so revolting to your father. Even of my fortune, such as it was, you knew the exact amount. I never endeavoured to impose upon *you* by supposititious heirships; and the allowance made by my grandmother was expressly explained to be conditional. In return, I have been taught, to my cost, that in certain spheres of life, it does not do to accept people's fortune, qualities, or expectations, simply on their own showing."

Writhing under the consciousness of former disingenuousness, Charles Barrington answered these bitter words by a still more vexatious retort. He saw that his father's letter had drawn aside the veil from all he had so laboured to conceal. He saw that he was despised as well as detested; and in the frenzy of the moment, recrimination succeeded to acrimony. Incisive and corroding truths were, in short, exchanged on both sides, such as, like the small-pox, bequeath from the festering venom of an hour an indelible impression for life.

Lady Alicia's cognizance of the vulnerable heel of her victim enabled her, however, to plant the keenest shafts.

"Your father, though brutal, is, at least, more honest

than yourself!" said she. "I agree with him, that, since it was your policy to make an advantageous match, you were unpardonable in selecting the poor, proud minx who had outstayed her market, when Eleanor Maitland and her fifty thousand pounds were quite as much at the service of your *beaux yeux*! Or, if I clearly interpret the more mysterious part of Mr. Barrington's gentlemanly letter, when you might at least have secured a good housewife in the poor drudge of a cousin, who, when we visited your land of Canaan, made a conquest of my brother, as Charlotte of Werther, while cutting bread and butter in the pantry!"

Every drop of blood in Charles Barrington's body seemed, at that moment, to take refuge in his heart. He could scarcely find breath for utterance.

"Lady Alicia," said he, at last, in a low concentrated voice, "you are at liberty to attack me, for I have injured you. You are at liberty to revile my father—for, by prying into my letters, you have ascertained that he has spoken revilingly of yourself. But, by GOD'S mercy! not a syllable will I hear against poor Maria Brenton; who never spoke ill either of you or any other human being, and who is goodness and humbleness itself."

So contemptuous a smile denoted Lady Alicia's opinion of this burst of Quixotism, that, unwilling to insult her, and incapable of controlling his impotent rage, he dashed his hat upon his head, and rushed like a madman from the house.

Hastily directing his steps towards the quays, where he was secure from collision with his fashionable friends, he was not perhaps wholly free from the promptings which have beset so many unhappy beings on the same spot—to fling himself over the parapet, and put an end to his troubles. At *his* age, having, according to the laws of nature, half a century of life before him, to be bound heart, soul, and body to a woman with whom, henceforward, all sympathy, or even show of sympathy, was indeed a fate to fly from;—*he*, accustomed to women of so different a nature; he, so idolized by his mother—so cared for by the humble cousin who had been at once his servant and his friend!

But he deserved it. He admitted that he deserved it; that it was all his own doing. The paltry ambition of shining in a sphere that was not his own had betrayed him into a marriage branding him as with the eternal slavery of the galleys. Never should he forget the countenance—the air of demoniacal scorn with which Lady Alicia had alluded to the menial occupation of Maria and the pauperism of Easton. For Easton had begun to acquire a sort of charm in his eyes. Since he had been abroad, he had learned to prize it as the spot where he was worshipped, the spot where he was *loved*. And what has the most dazzling circle of wits—the most influential knot of politicians—the most polished *salon* of courtiers, to compare with *that*? How much less the miserable home of which he was so little the master! After long, long hours of bitter self-communing, he was forced to return, however, to this joyless shelter; and, as he passed the porter's lodge, the *concierge* stepped out and placed a letter in his hand.

After the adventure of the pink note and the mischance attending his father's disastrous communication, Charles Barrington had peremptorily ordered that his letters should be delivered solely to himself; and it was only, thanks to his tempestuous exit from the house, that some hours' delay had arisen in his receipt of a despatch which arrived at the same moment with that of Lord Henry.

He took the letter listlessly from the porter—barely casting his eye upon the address—like one who knows his worst, and has nothing more to care for in this world. But on seeing the handwriting he started. It was one that had become almost unfamiliar to him—and which the tremulousness of the writer's hand in inscribing his name, rendered still more difficult to recognise. Nevertheless, he was sufficiently moved by the reminiscences with which it was connected, to place it in his waistcoat pocket, and, hurrying up to his dressing-room, lock himself in, previous to breaking the seal, instead of reading it during his leisurely ascent of the staircase, as he would have done a second communication from the writer of the pink note.

He was right; for the letter was one of considerable length, as well as of vital import to the happiness of his future life. Already the hot blood had rushed to his cheeks

on perceiving that it was dated from his birthplace—from the home of his forefathers—from HEXHOLM !

“ I have delayed writing to you, my dear cousin—my dear friend—my dear old playmate,” wrote Maria Barrington, “ till enabled fully to comprehend the state of my affairs, and explain my intention of repairing the oversights of a will, which, with all gratitude and respect towards his memory, I cannot help feeling to have been prompted by undue partiality on the part of my poor uncle.

“ I left to others the ungracious task of apprising you that he had bequeathed me the whole of his fine fortune, amounting to somewhat more than twelve thousand a-year; the principal being secured in a manner to render it impossible for me to follow the impulses of my inclination in its re-distribution. As far as lies in my power, however, dear Charles, I wish to do my utmost towards equalizing our lot.

“ Hexholm is to be my future residence, and there, I shall make it my duty to accomplish the projects and intentions of my late uncle. But for this, half my income will suffice. Half my income exceeds that on which my grandfather effected so much good in the country, and commanded such universal respect. The other half, dear cousin, is yours, on condition of paying a thousand a year to my dearest aunt for her separate enjoyment; and effecting, with part of the remainder, such an insurance on my life as will prevent your suffering a painful deprivation in the event of my death. More than four thousand a year will remain for your personal enjoyment.

“ Do not think me ungenerous, however, dearest Charles, if I encumber my donation by further conditions; first, that not even to your wife, your accession of fortune be explained as derived from any other source than a will, the particulars of which can never reach beyond our family; next, that you use your influence with my uncle, to procure me the happiness of his wife’s society, for as large a portion of every year as she can be prevailed upon to be my inmate; and, lastly, that you take an early opportunity of getting into Parliament, and exerting your excellent abilities to obtain such distinctions in public life as, had you secured them

during his life-time, would, I am convinced, have determined my generous benefactor to make you his heir.

“If I rightly understood the tenor of Lord Heriford’s arrangements at the time of your marriage, five hundred a-year was given you by some member of the family, till an official appointment could be obtained. By this, it strikes me that your public career would be unduly shackled; and if I dare suggest a line of conduct to one so much better acquainted than myself with the usages of the world, I should think you would become more independent by relinquishing both the allowance and alternative.

“On this point, pray follow your own good pleasure. But it may afford some grounds for your government, to know that the arrangements I propose are already secured by deeds drawn up by my uncle’s solicitor, under the direction of my guardian, Mr. Fitzhugh. On the 7th of March I attain my majority, and the day following, they will be signed; unless, in the interim, you have some change to suggest.

“I will not disguise from you, dear cousin, that I have had some difficulty in obtaining the sanction of my trustee to my projects. Not knowing by how deep a sense of the duty of restitution my conduct is actuated, he persists in foreseeing a time when an establishment of my own, or a growing inclination for the luxuries of life, will insure repentance of my present views. For Mr. Fitzhugh is a new acquaintance, Charles, and cannot understand how impossible it would be for me to create a scheme of happiness in which your welfare had not the foremost place. *You* know that I shall never marry; and, so long as I see you occupying in the world the position to which you are qualified to do honour, how could I ever regret or repent a gift which, to *me*, God knows, is but a trifling sacrifice!

“And now, farewell. I have paid to your account at Coutts’s, lest you should be annoyed about the means of an immediate return to England, a sum of two thousand pounds. Had you been here, I know not how I should ever have found courage to talk about what I have found it even difficult to write; but I need not, surely, add, that the strongest proof of brotherly affection you can afford me is,

by accepting my offers in the same free spirit they are made by

“Your affectionate Friend and Kinswoman,

“MARIA BARRINGTON.”

The emotion with which this startling letter was perused by a man whom it seemed expressly sent to rescue from the depths of shame and despair subsided, as he perused the last two words, as though a bolt of ice had shot through his frame.

Yes! Maria BARRINGTON she should from the first have been! It was no fault but his own that there existed an *Alicia* Barrington; but for which calamity, what happiness might now have been his portion! For the discovery had not *followed* her accession of fortune. By living under the roof with fine ladies, he had learned to estimate the charm of the gentle, submissive, punctual being, who was so much more deserving the name of woman; and the very month succeeding the month of moonshine which we call the honey-moon had sufficed to convince him that, as a companion for life, the woman who loves us is preferable to the woman we love. How much more to one who neither loves nor is beloved;—to the worse half of a *mariage de convenance*.

But after his first burst of feeling, he found that in this overwhelming stroke of fortune he must not think of Maria. To enjoy his prospects without reserve, he must not think of Maria. To triumph, without compunction, over his haughty wife, he must not think of Maria. Even *his* sterile nature would have found tears like a well-spring in the desert, had he permitted himself to dwell upon one who felt so tenderly for his mortifications and thought so nobly for his honour:—the woman who had forgiven him for preferring the beauty of Eleanor,—who had forgiven him for preferring the distinction of Lady Alicia;—and who, content to resign half her fortune to him, was about to bury her youthful charms in obscurity, with no other companion than the mother who shared her misplaced affection.

That she had refused to be Marchioness of Heriford, thanks to her own delicacy and his brother-in-law's reserve, he was never likely to be apprised. But Charles was

beginning to be too familiar with the London world, to be ignorant that, with a fortune like hers, a choice of marquises was at her disposal. And she was willing to relinquish them all,—all that London envelopes within the gorgeous folds of its mantle of purple and gold,—to live wedded to the pale shadow of friendship which had wandered by her side amid her childhood's dreary waste.

To escape the shame of reflecting upon all this, he sat down and indited a hurried letter of warm and unqualified acceptance. And lucky that he did so at once; for acting, as was so rare with him, on the impulse of the moment, his letter wore some semblance of warmth of feeling.

Having expended upon it the better emotions that were stirring within him, till his nature became hard again, like the iron rendered malleable by temporary heat, he paused only to compose his plans sufficiently to assume in presence of his wife a tone of promptness and decision, ere he made his appearance in the *salon* of Lady Alicia.

In a few minutes his resolution was taken; but on reaching her presence, she was not alone. Though the lateness of the hour justified the lighting of the apartments for dinner, two guests were still seated by her fireside; the one a French duke, one of the *élégantissimes* of the Faubourg St. Germain, who, having understood that Lord Heriford's daughter had made a "*mariage ou d'amour ou d'argent, ou quelque bêtise pareille,*" treated her ill-chosen husband with the distance-driving civility due to a "*vil roturier;*" the other, a German Secretary of Legation, who, having been assured in Princess L——'s set, that "*cette charmante Anglaise*" was married to a "*freluquet,—un homme nul,*" usually addressed him in the patronizing tone used towards the hobble-de-hoy son of a family with whom people are in the habit of dining.

Both Monsieur le Duc and the Herr Baron, however, were a little surprised by the steadiness of step with which the man they had regarded as a hen-pecked puppet walked straight to the fireplace, bowed stiffly to both, and made it apparent by a glance, that, as soon as possible, without compromising themselves by an air of having been dismissed by his arrival, they had better vacate the field. Lady Alicia, who had been refreshing herself ever since his

departure by the *causerie* of a succession of visitors, with the pretext of canvas and a needle in her hand, *pour se donner une contenance*, was already compressing her thin lips with rage, while meditating a renewal of her sneers in reproof to his ill-breeding the moment they quitted the room; when, lo! a single glance at his face informed her that her kingdom was taken from her—that the slave was free!

With a smile, admirably copied from one of her own cold-blooded assumptions of courtesy, Charles Barrington addressed the Duc de B——, to inquire whether he had any commissions for England. And Monsieur le Duc, whose errand with Lady Alicia was to entreat, in the name of the duchess, his mother, and several other *sommités* of the Faubourg St. Germain, that her ladyship would accept a list, as patroness of the ball for the benefit of the *pensionnaires de la liste civile*, which was fixed among the latest of the season, looked as unexquisitishly surprised at the demand, as though he had been a reasonable being, or the sky exhibited symptoms of falling.

“*Pour l'Angleterre? Mais je croyais tantôt comprendre, milédi*, he was beginning, when his eloquence was playfully cut short by Lady Alicia.

“*Quand vous avez affaire à mes compatriotes*,” said she, “*ne prétendez jamais compter sur leurs mouvemens. Il suffit qu'on vous annonce un voyage à la Mer Rouge, pour intimer un véritable départ pour la Mer Blanche.*”

“*Que le projet sinistre annoncé par Monsieur Barineton, nous laisse au moins l'espoir que vous ne nous quitterez pas avant la fin du Carnaval!*” replied the young duke, rising to take leave, and bowing his way, chamberlain-wise, out of the room;—while the Secretary of Legation followed his example in silence, but not without an inward meditation of “*Voilà une lune de miel qui commence à tourner diablement en lune de fiel!*”

The door having closed upon them, Lady Alicia waited, with well-dissembled unconcern, for some further explanation of the altered plans and deportment of her husband. But he chose to be interrogated. He was now in a position to *choose*. Already, the leaven of his father's character was beginning to rise within him.

Her ladyship's curiosity being stronger than her self-command, she could not long refrain from inquiries.

"After all, then," said she, "we are about to return to England. That for which a seat in Parliament was not sufficient inducement, has apparently been decided by a shifting of the wind."

No answer!

It is true, Charles was busily occupied in what occupies a large portion of Parisian winter life,—proving that *le mieux est l'ennemi du bien*,—by displacing the logs admirably adjusted by their French servant, in order to fill the room with smoke.

"And where, may I ask, are we to go?" persisted Lady Alicia, hoping to taunt him into the reply that was not suggested by politeness. "Have you been planning a pleasant spring for me among your country neighbours at Easton Hoo?"

"Not unless you prefer it to the house in Belgrave Square, or Grosvenor Place, which I have written to your brother Henry to engage for us!" was his cool rejoinder.

"A house in Belgrave Square!" repeated Lady Alicia, looking nearly as unpardonably astonished as the Duc de B——.

"When you were so witty this morning on the subject of supposititious heirships," replied her husband, with well-sustained coolness, "it did not seem to occur to you, that, though the disposal of my uncle's property had proved so great a disappointment to my father, some modification might have been made in my favour. Anxious to penetrate your secret sentiments towards me, I allowed you say your worst; and that worst comprehended such utter scorn of me and my affairs, that I judged it superfluous to acquaint you, that the allowance hitherto made me has been so nobly replaced, as to admit of my dispensing for the future with the stipend,—salary,—what shall I call it,—allotted by your family; who, as you justly observed, took my talents and honour too much upon trust! If, on the other hand, I consent to sit for Lord Heriford's borough, it will only be on condition of exercising the most perfect independence in the House of Commons; and if I do *not* find my conditions palatable," continued he, with a command of

voice and countenance that did ample credit to the accomplished dissembler before him of whom he was the pupil, "it is not impossible that I may try my fortune against Lord Clandon for Buckinghamshire. My family interest there was (as you learned from himself at Easton) established some centuries before his own; nor could I make an appropriation of my uncle's rupees more grateful to his memory than by asserting the dignity of his family name, where it has been unfairly disparaged."

As he pronounced these startling announcements, the emotions which, three hours before, had produced so wild a commotion in the veins of the husband, seemed transferred to those of the wife. But *hers* was a mind that looked straight to results, and dwelt little upon means. Even at that irritating moment, all she saw was the accomplishment of her ambitions;—a house in town, and a position so influential as to enable her to march front to front with Lady Mortayne!

No matter that it was to be obtained from the hand of a husband, upon whose heart she had trampled, even unto bruising. *He* occupied but small space in the picture which developed itself before her mind's eye. If she thought of him at all, it was chiefly in admiration of the self-command he had exercised, in disdaining to fling the truth in her face, while smarting that morning under her insolent attack.

"I did not give him credit for such strength of character!" was her secret reflection. "One may make something of him in time."

Lady Alicia was not likely to surmise that, in her turn, she had been deceived; and that "*à trompeur, trompeur et demi!*"

She was not even fully aware that, where vitriol has been thrown upon the earth, let the sun shine as it may, the herbage refuses to grow again; and that neither art nor blandishment would ever restore her to even the moderate place she had occupied in the regard of her husband. But it was not domestic confidence from which *she* had ever looked to extract the happiness of life; and she was scarcely able to subdue within becoming limits her feelings of exultation, while completing her hasty preparations for an immediate return to England, to commence her brilliant career.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Oh ! les jolis tableaux !—Que ces gens soût heureux,
 Comme leur vie est gaie, et comme ils n'ont d'affaire
 Que les rians propos, la musique, les jeux,
 Le loisir sans scrupule, et l'amour sans mystère.

EMILE AUGIER.

“My liege lady, generally,” quod he,
 “Women desyren to have soveraynte
 As well over ther husbondes as ther love.”—CHAUCER.

LORD BOWBRIDGE and Lord Mortayne were far from the only persons who decided Lady Alicia Barrington to be wonderfully improved by her sojourn in Paris. On many, the courtesies of manner and graces of adornment she had acquired in a capital, where, of all others, people learn to make the best of their personal appearance, produced a strong impression ; while, with others, the consequence derived from standing on a sufficient pedestal conferred on her the charm of the *cestus*.

No one was surprised to see the Barringtons commence their London with an excellent house, establishment, and equipage. The newspaper announcement of Humphrey Barrington's inheritance sufficed to satisfy the world that the handsome young man of good prospects, who had flirted through the preceding season with Eleanor Maitland, was now in the enjoyment of his fortune. As a man with thousands per annum,—as the husband of a Right Honourable Lady Alicia,—as the Honourable Member for Rattleford,—he had only realized his former deceptive assumptions.

This was a happy thing for him ; since no omen more inauspicious can attend a *début* of any kind in society, than a general feeling of surprise that demands explanation.

Even Lady Mortayne, the only person in whom some astonishment was justifiable that, with prospects so brilliant, he had not endeavoured to efface from her mind the unfavourable impressions produced by her visit to Easton, having given implicit confidence to the paragraph recited to her by her husband, relative to his accession of fortune, began to attribute to the desire of adding distinctions of rank to those

of money, that sudden transfer of his attentions to the daughter of the Marquis of Heriford which she had hitherto ascribed to her coldness.

The vexation of finding the rival, whom, for a moment, she fancied crushed by her own union with the popular and distinguished Mortayne, prepared to dispute with her the palm of fashion, possessed of the same worldly advantages, and actuated by the same hollow-hearted pretensions, served, however, only as a spur to her flagging vanity, and increased the interest of her return to town.

“It will be hard, indeed, if, matching my face and age against Alicia’s, I do not obtain the best of it!” meditated Lady Mortayne, while surveying herself in the swing-glass of her new mansion in Brook Street, arrayed for the drawing-room, at which her presentation as a bride has already been described; and though, in spite of the airy grace of the ringlets playing like light around her delicately-turned throat and against cheeks rivalling the delicate texture of the rose-leaf, she was not wholly able to withdraw the public gaze from the dignified figure of Lady Alicia Barrington, attired with the perfection of taste that nothing but Paris can supply; the taste that forbids the introduction of a flower, bow, feather, or inch of lace too much, whereas the chief aim of English costume seems to consist in exaggeration,—there was certainly some pretext for the enthusiasm with which the fashionable journals dwelt upon the splendour of Lady Mortayne’s diamonds and the lustre of her eyes.

Lady Heriford, by whom the two brides were presented, and who, recently arrived in town, was overwhelmed with compliments on the happy establishment in life of both her daughter Alicia and her *débutante* of the preceding year, (unable to resent against the latter her withdrawal of Morty from poor Lady Sophia, seeing how unceremoniously Charles Barrington had been appropriated by poor Lady Sophia’s sister), could not forbear glancing, amid the felicitations with which she was overwhelmed, at the happy bridegrooms of the two envied brides.

For there, all was not as it should have been! Though by nature a nearer-sighted person than might be expected of her mother’s daughter and daughter’s mother, it was impossible for Lady Heriford to be otherwise than struck by

the hollow eyes of Lord Mortayne, and by the lowering brow of her son-in-law. No brightness of exultation shone in either of their faces.

Of the latter, however, who was making his first appearance in that brilliant scene, in the highly-becoming uniform of Lord Heriford's yeomanry hussars, in which, with that very view, he had obtained a commission, as much was said in extolment of his fine features and striking appearance, as though he were a *parti* to be disposed of. Nor was it possible for Eleanor to close her ears against the commendations lavished upon him, which, among the fairer moiety of the spectators, exceeded even those of which she was the object.

"I had no idea Mr. Barrington was half so good-looking!" observed Lady Essendon, who had troubled herself little about his looks, good or bad, till she found him a man of sufficient consequence to become the object of an opinion. "I am sure no one thought much of him last season!"

"Fine feathers make fine birds," retorted Lady Barbara Bernardo, the gaudy plumage of whose vulgar husband usually rivalled that of a macaw; "and he has got such a divine uniform!"

"It is the same worn by Lord Henry de Capell, and I am sure it does not make an Apollo of *him*!" replied the countess, who being a quiet domestic woman, and no scandal-monger, little knew how strongly her observation inclined Lady Barbara to extinguish her by slow poison. "And just now, in the presence-chamber, I heard the new ambassador, Prussian, Russian, Austrian—what is he?—(I never remember the names or distinctions of the *corps diplomatique*)" —

"So I should have guessed!" murmured Lady Barbara, though in too low a voice to interrupt her.

—"But I mean the man in magnificent regimentals, all over turquoises and embroidery, and covered with orders,—inquire Mr. Barrington's name, and say he was decidedly the finest figure he had seen in England."

"A mere sympathy of gold lace!" cried Lady Barbara pettishly, shrugging her shoulders. But the eyes of Lady Mortayne, beside whom she was standing in the vicinity of the Marchioness of Heriford, turned instinctively at the

observation towards the towering form of Charles Barrington, made prominent by his showy hussar accoutrements; and, a few moments afterwards, *from* that brilliant figure to the person of Lord Mortayne, disfigured by the most frightful costume of civilized Europe—an English court-dress—something between the uniform of the “Monkey who has seen the world,” and the gala dress of the *valetaille* of continental courts,—which even Morty’s proverbial elegance of aspect could not redeem from the ridiculous.

He was not even looking at his ease. The drawing-room was a scene almost as strange to him as to his rival, and far more uncongenial. An appearance once a year at the levee, as a suitable homage to his sovereign, was all he had ever attempted in his “Morty” days;—in the discreet consciousness that a man having neither wife nor daughter to escort is as much an encumbrance to others as his bag and sword to himself. There was consequently some pretext for feeling uncomfortable and out of place. However proud to present to the world, as his wife, the lovely being whose appearance in the throng was greeted by a murmur of applause, he could not help thinking that the only thing to be done at the drawing-room, after quitting the royal presence, was to inquire for the carriage.

It might have afforded some consolation to the feelings of vexation produced in what Lady Mortayne would have called her “heart,” by the exterior inferiority of her lord, could she have surmised that the very beauty which so dazzled her in Barrington was a source of annoyance to his wife. It was to *that*, rather than to the unaffectionateness of her nature and *hauteur* of her conduct, that Lady Alicia attributed his estrangement. Above all, it was to *that* she ascribed his preference of the idlest scenes of youthful pastime,—ball, masquerade, or concert—to the graver political circles, with a taste for which she was desirous of inspiring him. Instead of forwarding her hopes that he would adopt his parliamentary career with the zeal indispensable to distinction, the new member went through his duties with the careless levity of one whose world is elsewhere; one whom “a few hundreds” have rendered the representative of a family borough to which he is wholly unaccountable, and to the patron of which he is pledged only to give his

vote for government, when government happens to be hard pressed.

Her own intentions, however, were by no means changed by discovering that the battle must be fought single-handed. The greater the distance between her and her husband, the more completely was she at liberty to dispose of her time and engagements. Charles Barrington seemed bent on proving to her, that, *roturier* as he was, he could be as high bred in conjugal indifference as the best-born duke of her favourite Faubourg St. Germain.

Profiting by this letter of license, she accordingly hastened to attach herself, by every filament within reach, to the dignitaries of the party supported by her family, in the way dignitaries of a party most value,—by their “ayes” and “noes.” While her cousin Eleanor was enjoying the much-coveted delight of inauguration in the sacred circle of *ultra* Fashion, more important in *her* eyes than Royalty itself, the loftier bride, to whom the smiles of duchesses and marchionesses were too familiar to be of the smallest account, derived scarcely less satisfaction from the introductions she requested from her mother to two or three bald-headed men, shuffling with crab-like grace out of the palace, and one or two particularly disagreeable-looking women, whose words were as round as their persons angular; but whose names will make the fortune of a book of memoirs, fifty years hence.

A few of the heads of the *corps diplomatique*, on the other hand, voluntarily solicited to be made known to Lady Alicia Barrington; according to the orders to that effect transmitted to them, as per electric telegraph, from the head-quarters of intrigue;—totally forgetting, even while gazing upon her unattractive face, that she was the same Lady Alicia de Capell to whom they had been accustomed to perform the morning and evening service of a bow, in each of the hundred and twenty-two days of the preceding London season.

Any one disposed to notice the acquaintanceships made, or renewed, on that memorable day by the two brides, might have understood how totally distinct their ideas and ambitions; Fashion being the idol of the one, as Influence of the other.

Meanwhile, however cold the department of the honour-

able member for Rattleford towards his wife, and however abhorrent his feelings, he was far from insensible to the credit she imparted to his social position. While conversing with the first men of the day, with an intelligence brightened and polished by recent intimacy with those able talkers of France, by whom conversation is cultivated as one of the fine arts, or, rather, among whom fireside fluency is prized as scarcely less valuable than the eloquence of the *rostrum*,—Lady Alicia appeared to have stepped into the exact niche which nature qualified her to grace. She was not only thoroughly in her place, but it was one that afforded more consistency to the position of her husband, as a newly-inheriting man, possessing neither landed property nor aristocratic connection, than the utmost beauty and *gentillesse* of his fair partner of the preceding season.

Far other, alas! the feelings with which poor Morty contemplated the young wife by his side, whose tiara of diamonds bespoke the admiration of the vulgar; and whose lovely face, of all. He was scarcely less annoyed by the airs of indulgence with which she was received by the great ladies of his *élite* set, as a novice requiring encouragement, than by the familiarity affected towards her by boys like Lord Newbury and Henry de Capell.

“How amazingly late you have come to town!” said the latter, interrupting, without ceremony, the embarrassed dialogue which accompanied her first introduction to the supercilious countess of Bowbridge. “D’ye know there were bets out you would not come at all,—that you were going to ruralize through the season? Wasn’t it good,—eh?”

“Have you been very gay, then,” replied Lady Mortayne, blushing from the fear of what might follow, “that you consider the beginning of May a late period of the season?”

“Oh! amazingly! Lots of balls! If the influenza and Passion week had not come to set us right, one might have mistaken April for July! We missed you shockingly at the *soirées* at Heriford House, didn’t we, Henry? What fun we used to have last season, eh, Lady Mortayne, leading the *cotillon* through the suite, down the back staircase, and up again through the great hall! Do you remember

that famous night when Henry made you carry the sofa-cushion to Esher, who turned sulky, and looked very much as if he were going to throw it at your head?"

While Lady Bowbridge stood by, listening in dignified silence, as if waiting till Lady Mortayne was at liberty to withdraw her attention from topics so interesting and renew the conversation with herself, poor Morty felt that, had a cushion been within reach, he might have been tempted to follow Lord Esher's example. But before the prating grandson of his friend Huntingfield had half exhausted his silly reminiscences, Lord Henry de Capell commenced a series of whispers, a thousand times more offensive.

"When may I come and see you?" said he. "I hear you have a capital house,—which means, I hope, that you intend to do something to amuse us. We are sadly in want of something new; why not give Mazurka parties? Mazurka parties would be immensely popular; and, so fond as you are of dancing, amuse you better than all the stupid dinner parties in the world."

"We will talk it over some morning, when you have seen my house," replied Lady Mortayne, solely with the view of getting rid of him.

"The Barringtons, who have been in town since March," resumed Lord Henry, nodding, rather than bowing, his acceptance of her proposition, "are by way of giving grand dinners, and that sort of thing. Alice was sure to have the dulllest house in town; and she has made Charley as serious, and nearly as full of pretensions as herself. But now, *you* are come, you will perhaps bring him to his senses; which, I must do him the justice to say, have been absent without leave ever since he became a member of Parliament."

Of this "bald disjointed chat," not a syllable was lost on Mortayne; who listened simply because he saw that Lady Bowbridge was silently forming an opinion of his pretty wife, from the nature of the incense laid upon her shrine. There might have been a time when he talked in the same rattling, vapid style himself. But it was in his beardless boyhood—twenty years before—so long, that he had forgotten everything about the matter, except his sovereign contempt for the women to whom his nonsense was dedicated. Even

now, he could scarcely think of them without shrugging his shoulders!

And to hear a wife bearing his name, addressed with such prating familiarity, and in the hearing of Lady Bowbridge, who had always thought so highly of his taste!

If, after all, this lovely, graceful Eleanor, who, had he taken her at her word, would have been passing the spring with him among the lilacs and laburnums of their secluded shrubbery in the north, should turn out one of the group of dancing, flirting, young married women of the London season, whom he had always regarded as the most pitiful specimen of the sex! If, after all, *his* name should be trailed in the dust of every ball-room—polluted by the censure of every club!

As the idea glanced into his mind, his countenance assumed so despairing an expression, that he was not surprised, on rousing himself from his *rêverie*, to find the eyes of Lady Bowbridge fixed upon him with looks of ineffable compassion. For a vast looking-glass, opposite to which they were standing, reflected the whole group; and the contrast between Lady Mortayne's spring-like form and apple-blossom complexion, and his own forlorn person, was only too grievously apparent.

Unwilling to dwell on objects so unsatisfactory, his eye took a wider range in the same tell-tale mirror; and, lo! the dignified figure of Lady Alicia de Capell, as she stood receiving the compliments of a prince of the blood, brought back so accusingly to his thoughts the image of the Sophia whom, at that moment, she strongly resembled, that it was no wonder he found it difficult to preserve his patience, when Lord Newbury recommenced his flippant flirtation with the Lady Mortayne so far less suitable to his age and habits of life.

“By Jove! what a surly brute it is!” observed Lord Newbury, turning to Lady Mary de Capell, as soon as Morty having, by persuasive looks, and a still more persuasive jerk of the arm, managed to impress on the lovely Eleanor that, her presentation being over, there was no occasion for her lingering at the palace so long as it might suit Lady Heriford and her unmarried daughters—they disappeared

from the gallery. "A pretty joke truly, if a superannuated Don Juan, like Mortayne, should take into his head to bring back from the East the lock-up-wife principle, and veil-and-lattice system!"

"I hardly think it would answer with my friend Nelly," rejoined Lady Mary, laughing; "but I must say, Lord Newbury, in justification of his Oriental fancies, that you attacked her somewhat like a Turk."

"And I can tell you it will not answer to put Bluebeard out of sorts!" added Lord Henry. "Having lost the Baringtons' house as a lounge, we cannot afford to part with Mortayne's."

Then, taking him by the arm, he quietly impelled him down stairs.

"Bernardo's carriage must be here by this time," said he. "I desired him to send it back for me, and I can set you down at Mirart's on my way to Heriford House."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Have they not got polemics, and reform,
 Peace, war, the taxes, and (what's called) the nation,
 The struggle to be pilots in the storm,
 The landed and the monied speculation,
 The joys of mutual hate to keep them warm,
 Instead of Love,—that mere hallucination?—BYRON.

HAD any one undertaken to insure to Charles Barrington or his wife, at the commencement of the preceding season, the position they now enjoyed, both would have regarded it as bliss beyond compare, as well as the unattainable vision of a fairy tale.

Could Charles have believed that he was to exchange the miserable discomfort of Easton, his precarious allowance and uncertain standing in society, for a noble fortune, a noble wife, a seat in Parliament, and the command of a well-appointed house in Arlington Street, he would have called himself a new Aladdin; or if, in Lady Alicia's case, to these

advantages was added the alliance of one who passed for the handsomest young man about town, the superannuated young lady's notion of worldly bliss would have been quite as lavishly perfected as that of her husband.

Yet happiness was not in their household. The one thing needful was wanting. They were at peace neither with themselves nor with each other. Open warfare had not been renewed since they quitted Paris; but only because there was too much of the epicurean in both, to hazard the *discomfort* of dissension.

To the world, therefore, nothing was apparent of their mutual contempt. The world saw only the easy grace with which Lady Alicia did the honours of her house, and the supreme excellence of her dinners. For, with the true instinct of her calling, her ladyship had soon discovered that the shortest way to people's intellects is the same as that usually described as the shortest way to their hearts; and that to make them talk supremely well at her table, she must make her *menu* equally supreme. A moderately-good *chef* would not suffice to attract those whose vocation it is to barter their birthright of wit for a mess of pottage.

One of her first communications with her Parisian friends after her installation in town, therefore, regarded the transmission of a French cook, of sufficient merit to collect together under her roof the tribe of British and foreign *cébrités*, born to perfect the subordination of mankind, as that of Levi to minister to the mysteries of the synagogue; a commission that sufficed to confirm her in their estimation, as worthy to preside over a branch-*bureau* of their calling—the white slave-trade of modern civilization.

It did not surprise them to perceive, in due distance of time after the start of Monsieur Pointd'ail and his accessories, that the paragraphs extracted from the London papers exhibited weekly, in a list of the company "entertained by Mr. and Lady Alicia Barrington, at their splendid mansion in Arlington Street," the names of the leading ambassadors and ambassadresses,—cabinet ministers, privy councillors, law-lords, ex-governors-general, and retired lords-lieutenant after their kind;—besides presidents of academies, and now and then an artist or literary man of European renown, as a spice of flavour to the cabinet

pudding. Such guests and such a cook were as inseparable as cause and effect; or as the dual principle of the Hegelian philosophy.

A few of the Morty set,—a few of the White'sians, sufficiently versed in London life to know that a *clique* of this description is generally the foundation of years,—a cairn constructed by the voluntary contributions of personal respect rather than a Pimlico palace built by contract,—could not forbear inquiring, in one of their morning *juntas*, what took Lord Chancellors and archbishops, French ambassadors, English dukes, and, above all, such squaretoes as Lord and Lady Coysfield, to dine with such a person as “young Barrington.” To which Old Vassall, a man as fully versed as “Dodd's Peerage” in the intricacies of aristocratic relationships, replied that the Coysfields were his cousins; while, as regarded the still bigger wigs, a general chorus arose to explain, that they went to dine, not with “young Barrington,” not even with his cook,—but with his wife; the woman by whom the *casserole* trap was baited.

“Lady Alicia, I can assure you, is a most superior woman!” observed some one who had tasted the *suprême de cailles* of Pointd'ail.

“A woman of first-rate understanding!” added another, who was ambitious of the same honour, and, knowing that he was talking in a place where what is said, is said to be repeated, trusted his defence would be properly reported. “She was in Princess L——'s set, this winter in Paris, and passed among them for one of their best talkers.”

“Indeed? Why, if praised by *them*, she must be something better than a good talker,—*i. e.* a good listener!” cried Sir John Hildyard; “and, by Jove! I'll go and leave a card in Arlington Street this very afternoon.”

“It is a great relief to find that Lady Alicia, not her husband, is ‘*l'Amphytrion où l'on dine!*’” observed Lord Mortayne apart to the last speaker, as soon as the noisier group were out of hearing. “Before I came to town, the *réclames* of the *Morning Post* apprised me that a new power had arisen among the great dining-houses of the great metropolis; and, not perceiving any justification for Barrington's sudden accession of consequence saving the

M.P. attached to his name, I was afraid this portended a new prodigy in the House of Commons. One has had such an inundation of prodigies within the last few years!"

"And the young Roscii are so apt to progress into lumbering hobble-de-hoys," added Sir John, with one of his quiet smiles, "that, *blasé* with genius à *si bon compte*, one begins to languish after the common-place. Like the meteors on the stage, the smell of the resin puts one out of conceit with the blaze."

"A good table is certainly a safer kind of sublimity than great oratory, as times go!" rejoined Mortayne. "Your man of genius, with a certain number of thousands a-year, is, moreover, always mistrusted. The vulgar conceive that his talents are grown for him, like his prize pine-apples and carly peas, by people salaried to understand the business better than himself."

"Of course—of course! Hope never showed himself cleverer than by disowning 'Anastasius,' till it had gained its ground," retorted Hildyard. "Put forth as the work of Cræsus, it would have been read only by his friends; who, behind his back, would have gone about screwing up their mouths, and wishing he had consulted *them* before he ventured upon print."

"But why *shouldn't* a man purchase a parliamentary, as well as a philanthropic, or any other reputation?" rejoined Mortayne, with a languid smile. "Advertise in the *Times* for a good speech of so many minutes on Free Trade, or the Oregon Question, and I have no doubt you would secure half-a-dozen *chef-d'œuvres!*"

"Prize essays,—not speeches!" interrupted Hildyard. "Pliny told us, some ages ago, that you may simulate philosophy, but not eloquence: for which reason there is more integrity in parliamentary renown than any other I wot of."

"It is a species of celebrity that has done much harm in its time," replied his friend. "There is far too much specchifying for the newspapers going on in the House. All laurels contain poison, we are told; but it is strongest in those that spring in a soil which should produce only esculents for the good of the country. All honour to Pointd'ail, therefore, who has relieved us from a Chatham,

forced into bloom by Lady Alicia Barrington's ambition of notoriety!"

"But is it a house worth dining at?" inquired Hildyard, who, having noticed the names of Lord and Lady Mortayne among the recent guests in Arlington Street, was desirous to ascertain a fact, important to a man whose days being bespoken in the highest places, cannot afford to waste one upon anything mediocre.

"Lady Alicia is an old friend,—Lady Alicia is my wife's cousin!" replied Morty; an answer instantly interpreted by Hildyard into "scandal in disguise."

"I understand—I understand!" cried he. "Thanks! On second thoughts, I will *not* leave a card."

"Then you will do yourself and the Barringtons wrong," rejoined Mortayne, more warmly. "Believe me, I saw nothing to blame in either the hosts or their table. If I found the thing a bore, the fault was in myself. But one grows sick of seeing the same eternal efforts recommencing again and again; people labouring to construct a *clique*, or a cabal, in eighteen hundred and forty anything, precisely with the same cunning one saw in use in eighteen hundred and twenty, and which our fathers beheld in operation twenty years before."

"I am afraid, my dear Morty, you and I have our London a little too accurately by heart!" rejoined Sir John, with half a smile and half a sigh. "I remember reading in Dr. Plot's history of my native county, of an idiot who, having lived many years near a turret clock, and repeated the hours after it, continued after it had been removed to repeat the hours as correctly as before! The force of habit renders one a sad automaton."

"And as Pope observes in his letters," added his companion, with the sigh without the smile, "out of habit and out of HELL, there is no redemption!"

"You should not say so, Morty," rejoined Sir John Hildyard, "after taking us by surprise, as you did, by your marriage! I never expected to miss you from my side in the ranks of the

Bachelors of England, who live at home at ease;

much less that, having deserted us, you should still com-

plain of the monotony of London life. You have now seen the shield on its golden side."

"Which does not prevent its being the self-same shield which I approached on the silver one!" rejoined Mortayne, more cheerfully. "From the moment one joins the *corps d'armée* of society, whether we fight in the light infantry or heavy brigade, the field to be conquered, and the means of conquering it, are the same. What can Lady Alicia Barington achieve by her endless toil of hospitality, but to do the thing worse in Arlington Street, than she has been seeing it done all her life at Heriford House?"

"Make herself popular. She probably wants to blind her handsome husband to her want of attraction."

Poor Morty almost winced. Even by an old friend, he could not bear to apprehend that his own *raw* was discovered.

"I suspect the handsome husband exercises but small share among her motives!" said he,—“My dear Alfred, how are you? From Lumley's, of course, by your privy-council airs! When are we to have the new ballet?"

But though it was easy to change the subject of conversation, he was tolerably well aware that people expressed quite as much wonder at his doing so *little* in his new establishment towards forwarding the pleasures of the season, as *he* at the gratuitous exertions of Lady Alicia. Morty's old friends had fully intended him to entertain them as freely as they had long been in the habit of entertaining himself. From *him* they wanted no *suprême de Cailles*. He might have had a Pointd'ail or a Jane Thompson to preside over his stoves, and their feeling on the subject would have been the same. They wanted to taste his bread and salt. Bowbridge and Hildyard wished to see him happy,—happy with his pretty wife,—happy under the shadow of his own vine: Lord Alfred and Alan Harkesley, to discover whether a wife and a vine of his own had converted even Morty into a snob.

But their interest or curiosity remained ungratified. Morty who professed "not to give dinners," gave nothing. On that point, Lord and Lady Mortayne were unanimous. The fair Eleanor had no mind to be matched against her more experienced kinswoman; nor, even if certain of

eclipsing her, had she the smallest taste for the *éclat* to be obtained by the small-talk emitted between ambassadors and cabinet-ministers, while eating *pâtés* at her dinner-table. For *her* there was as little charm in the hollow-hearted, hollow-chested, hollow-eyed sons of cipher, with their orders and disorders—cordons on their shoulders and bowstrings in their pockets,—as to Lady Alicia, in the slender guardsmen, the Lord Newburys and Henry de Capells, by whom, to the utter annoyance of her husband, Lady Mortayne was surrounded the moment her brilliant figure was seen in a ball-room.

Whenever from some opposite box at the opera he glanced into his own, to ascertain whether the moment were propitious for attempting the *séance* which even the most ultra-fashionable of husbands is allowed for half an hour or so, in the course of the evening, he saw it filled with a group of boyish faces, like cherubs clustered over a tombstone. Such companionship he could not but hold unsuitable to Cæsar's wife; and it was a relief to him whenever Barrington, whose manner was at least cold and correct and whose position in the world positive, made his appearance in the box, to take his almost silent place by the side of Lady Mortayne. Not because from that moment the lovely face of Eleanor assumed its most sunshiny appearance; but that no further inroad need be apprehended upon those formalities of custom which, in certain circles, are more formidable than law or pandect.

It was the delicate appreciation of these,—a tact that was incapable of sinning against the fitness of things, or hazarding a word or look save in the proper place,—which constituted the good breeding for which Morty had always been so famous. This fastidiousness *was*, in fact, Morty; and though, at a distance from London life,—in the wilds, no matter whether of Westmoreland or Arabia,—better qualities had assumed the ascendancy, no sooner was he once more involved in the ever-moving atmosphere of London, and the restless, noisy vulgar round of its tumultuous pleasures, than he experienced his former desire to mark his distinction from the herd, by calmer modes of life and a more reserved deportment.

When, on passing his drawing-room door one morning, on his way to his dressing-room, and, hearing shouts

of laughter proceed from it, in which the voice of Eleanor was intermingled with strange voices of the most vulgar intonation, and a key that would have done honour to a party of country cousins vociferating their wonder at the feats of Monsieur Philippe or Herr Dobler, it was no consolation to be told that his lady's visitors were Buckinghamshire neighbours of Lady Heriford,—“Mrs. and Miss, and Miss Georgiana Vicary Arable.” From Lady Alicia, such people would never have obtained toleration.

After a few hints, on arriving in town, concerning the selection of her acquaintance, he had, however, refrained from interference. He made allowance for the tastes of her age. He did not want her to think him a bore. After all, Lord Newbury, Lord Henry, and the rest of the cherubim, were of her own years, and in point of connexion, irreproachable. It was his own fault if he had selected a partner from a generation which was the posterity of his contemporaries. It was his own fault for having lived before his time, and for pretending to live after it.

At all events, he was careful not to expose the discrepancies of his *ménage* to the microscopic eyes of his intimates. Lord Alfred and Harkesley should not carry good stories to the Clubs of the *naïvetés* of the country-miss who presided over the cold cutlets and scorched turkey-poults of “poor Morty.” Nor did he choose to see some raw boy, like Newbury, occupying by her side at table the place of his urbane and intelligent friend Hildyard.

To Eleanor, this was a relief. She had rather apprehended a system of eternal dinner-giving to the class of middle-aged gentlemen whose conversation is chiefly prefaced by “I remember,” or “I recollect.” At Mortayne Manor, she had supped full of reminiscences; and was far better pleased to shine in ball-rooms, or *trôner* in her opera box, than preside over the stateliest entertainment ever planned and performed (for if funerals be “performed,” why not state dinners?) by the ambitious lady of Arlington Street. Not having yet attained the age of discovering to how much greater advantage a woman is seen in her own house than in that of any other person, she was glad to dispense with the *corvée* of entertaining people as tedious to *her*, as Old Vassall to her lord.

The danger of all this was, that the sameness of the home *tête-à-tête* might impart too great a charm to the company of such as, like Charles Barrington, were at the pains to make themselves agreeable elsewhere. So long a time had not elapsed since the preceding season, but he had still perfect, by heart, the whims and predilections of the lovely *débutante* of Heriford House. *He* knew, though Morty did *not*, what operas she preferred,—whose pictures attracted her to linger near them at the Exhibition,—the favourite passages of her favourite writers,—the pet shops she frequented,—the promenades she liked best,—and, above all, the negative or positive attraction of the various members of her set. No fear of *his* placing her at table near a bore. No fear of *his* omitting to inform her that one of her *affidées* was come to town. If Meshech Bernardo inquired, on entering the French play, whether Lady Mortayne were there, not the slightest chance of learning from *him* the number of her box!

With everybody, indeed, Barrington was becoming a popular man. All that had been uncommendatory in his manners the preceding season (the result of a false position and uncertain prospects), was giving place to a deportment as pleasing as his person had always been handsome. Barrington was invariably cited among the three best-looking men in London; and, as many years the junior of the Horatian and Cecilian triumvirate with whom the voice of society did him the honour to conjoin him, he had decidedly the best of it. When the lovely Lady Mortayne was seen leaning upon his arm on her *sortie* from some place of public amusement, or riding by his side in the park on her beautiful barb, the unsophisticated crowd, mistaking them for man and wife, was sure to proclaim them a charming couple.

“God bless ye, my lord and my lady!” was the cry of one of the Irish linkmen at the door of Lady Bowbridge’s ball; “sure it’s an iligant sight to see such as yees together!”

It was, at all events, a pleasure they often afforded. No two people of the set they lived in fell so readily to each other’s share. Habit had probably some influence in their approximation. They came instinctively together, at the close of a *fête*, as was their wont the preceding year; and it was as much pleasanter for Barrington to meet, on such oc-

casions, the sunny face that always smiled upon him, than the one whose dark eyebrows and marked features were habitually contracted by dread lest he should have been infringing *les convenances*, or talking nonsense to a magnifico (much in the habit of talking leading-articles), to whom she had been forced to present him, as to Eleanor to be accosted by one who exclaimed, "I will not ask whether you are tired—your looks answer for you. *You* feel, as I do, that it would be well to have so delightful a ball begin over again!"—instead of, "The carriage has been here these three hours! Are you aware that it is four o'clock?"

On this latter point, indeed, it was so difficult to impress Lady Mortayne, and Morty was one to whom it was so impossible to make a bugbear of his coachman, or set up his carriage-horses as personages to be respected (after the custom of most ball-going husbands of a certain age), that he accepted the less offensive alternative of stealing off as soon as night became at odds with morn, and leaving her to settle the question.

While surveying London, as a remote evil, from his Westmoreland fireside, a dancing Lady Mortayne had appeared an impossible thing! His sylph-like bride was of a dancing age, indeed, but she had embraced another destiny. She, who had chosen to be the wife of a Morty, must have known that Morty's wife was not to be confounded with the throng, or to act upon general principles. Morty's wife was specific—Morty's wife, like Falkland's, must not condescend to "run the gauntlet through a string of puppies."

There was no need to make an enactment on the subject. He was not going to present himself to the eyes of the lovely spirit that had alighted beside his household hearth in the guise of a tutor. She had, of course, tact enough to discern such things, unprompted. At all events, there was no immediate occasion to convert himself into a Mentor, for at that epoch he little contemplated a season in town.

But by the time a paroxysm of *ennui* determined them, as soon as the leaves were again on the trees, to hasten back to London—*dear* London—the London so reviled and so beloved—it was too late! Lady Mortayne had taken the initiative by speaking of dancing, as of breathing or eating

her breakfast—as a matter of course. After which, how was Morty to find courage to say, “Surely you do not mean to dance? The wife of a man of *my* age is out of place among dancers!”

No! decidedly he could not fling the first stone at himself by the words “a man of *my* age.”

Arrived in London, however, Eleanor showed no inclination to dance. The marked position assumed in society by Lady Alicia Barrington inspired her with a higher order of ambition—not, indeed, that of contending with the influential lady either as a dinner-giver or an *intrigante*; but to hold her own in Morty’s set—to obtain her allotment as Lady Mortayne, on the same line with the Duchess of Nantwich, Lady Bowbridge, Lady Harkesley, and the rest of the clique—a pretension which necessarily kept her aloof from the callow twitterers of the ball-room.

But having made the attempt, her pride revolted against the mere toleration extended to her. To those with whom she was desirous of identifying herself, Morty had so completely belonged, that they could not refrain from an air of patronage towards his pretty little wife, as if *she*, too, were their property;—regarding her with the same indulgent notice *she* bestowed on her Italian greyhound.

As much *de trop* among persons whose antecedents were totally unknown to *her* (though as well known to each other as if they formed part of the same family), as Barrington among the protocolists with blue ribands with whom his wife would fain have compelled him to consort, no wonder that, before the close of the month of June, she should be cited by the newspapers as among the *belles valseuses* at the ball of the French ambassadress.

An invitation to dance from a royal partner had, in the first instance, made refusal impossible. But, either because aware of the admiration she excited by resuming her place in the ball-room, or because Lord Mortayne was too proud to express his annoyance at seeing her confounded in the giddy crowd of the boys and girls of the day, she took his silence for approbation. From that night, not a *fête* at which Lady Mortayne, and her favourite partner of the preceding year, were not seen engaged together in what the *Morning Post*, with elegant originality, designates “the mazy round!”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A sort of intellectual mule,
 Man's stubborn mind in woman's shape ;—
 Too hard to love,—too soft to rule,—
 An owl engrafted on an ape.
 To what she calls the realm of mind
 She leaves that throne, her sex, to crawl ;
 The *cestus* and the charm resign'd,—
 A public gaping-show to all.

BULWER'S TRANSLATION OF SCHILLER.

THE progress of the season achieved for Lady Alicia Barrington, what the cross ugly girl, reclining in a corner of Lady Heriford's family coach the year before, had certainly never ventured to contemplate,—a definite position in the highest circle of London society.

Every one was ambitious of being on the visiting list of a person disposed to take so active a part in the pleasures of life ; and when, in the month of July, a period of the season when fine people have progressed into still finer, and the edge of the exterminating sword of exclusion is at its keenest, her ladyship's admirable dinner-parties were crowned with a select concert, consisting, by way of attraction, of the *élite* of the Italian opera, and by way of audience, of the handful of foreign royalties which, thanks to steam, arrive in England every spring by a migration as regular as that of the swallows,—all the foreign ministers and their females, and a couple of hundred persons of the highest rank or personal consideration,—Mrs. Vicary Arable and Lady Ironsides, who had been careful to send cards to the bride on her return from Paris, were forced mutually to admit that there was no use in troubling their heads further about Lady Alicia Barrington,—that “it was plain she fancied herself a very great lady and did not mean to be civil.”

The damsels in pink satin and lilac gauze, who had laboured so hard at Greensells to recommend themselves to the graciousness of the Ladies de Capell, suggested, indeed, to mama that it was all her own fault ;—that they had heard her describe the Barrington family to Lady Alicia's brother, Lord Clandon, as “people of whom she knew no-

thing." But Lady Ironsides assured them in return that *this* could have had no share in excluding them from Lady Alicia's charming concert, inasmuch as she had reason to know that Lord Clandon never entered his sister's house. As their county member, *he* was not able, even if inclined, to shake off in London the lady of the Buckinghamshire baronet, with the great park and great estate, whom it behoved him to entertain in the country;—and he was consequently forced to undergo, with apparent cheerfulness, their fussy state dinners in Cavendish Square. "Even Lord Clandon," added Lady Ironsides, "is not half fashionable enough for Lady Alicia."

The woman who was fine enough to cut her relations, and too fine to be seen in the usual places of public resort, passed, of course, with the vulgar for something exquisitely refined; and by the earnestness with which her acquaintance was sought by those usually courted for their notice, she had reason to congratulate herself on having accomplished her aim.

It was with the utmost reliance on herself and her consequence, therefore, that when, about the middle of July, the Dowager Lady Kilsythe passed through town on her annual expedition to the Isle of Wight, Lady Alicia displayed the house and establishment of which she was so proud, to grandmama and her sister Sophia, who, in the tranquil contentment of Warleigh, appeared to have regained all her happier impulses of youth and health.

"You have indeed a charming house, Alice!" said her sister, with warm approval, as they stood gazing from the drawing-room window across the animated scene of the Green Park, towards the far less favourably situated palace of their sovereign.

"Somewhat more cheerful, is it *not*, than the horrible old courtyard of Heriford House, which looks like the *préau* of a prison!"

"Did you fit it up yourself, my dear?" inquired grandmama, glancing contemptuously at the curtains of woollen damask.

"Myself, grandmama? Surely you give me credit for better taste! No! We took it as we found it. It was not worth while to make much alteration as we have it only for three years."

“*Three years ?*”

“Impossible to obtain a longer term. Lord Clanmorley, to whom it belongs, will be of age by that time, and intends to reside in it himself.”

“After all, then, it is a ready-furnished house, hired of a house-agent!—whereas, my dear Alice, what you graciously call a prison, is a family mansion,—a freehold,—the house built by your grandfather, and intended to last the time of his great-grand-children’s great-grand-children. That is what *I* call a charming house;—where the expenses and improvements you indulge in are not made for the benefit of strangers!”

“You forget, grandmama, that *I* am not married to a Marquis of Heriford!” argued Lady Alicia.

“You are married to a man who has attained, within a thousand a year, all the fortune he pretends to,” rejoined Lady Kilsythe; “and it would be consequently better policy to purchase outright a residence proportioned to it, and establish yourself for the remainder of your days.”

“I am not certain that such a purchase might be convenient to Mr. Barrington,” answered Lady Alicia, a little out of the habit of being taken to task.

“*Not convenient ?* When he has just come into a princely fortune,—a fortune enabling him to decline further assistance from my hands,—(a spirited and honourable feeling, by-the-bye, for which I give him ample credit). With the prospect of a family before you, you should persuade him, my dear, to provide you with a permanent abode.”

“*Entre nous*,—I have some reason to think,” rejoined Lady Alicia, in a lower key, “that Mr. Barrington’s fortune consists principally in an annuity,—a life income——”

“You have ‘*some reason to think*,’ retorted the dowager, hastily taking off the spectacles through which she had been contemplating the rising shrubberies of the Green Park, and seating herself magisterially in an arm-chair which had been placed for her near the window by Lady Sophia. “Are things come to such a pass between you after six months’ marriage, my dear, that you are admitted only so far into your husband’s confidence as to have ‘*some reason to think*’ about the terms of his uncle’s will ?”

“Most men are reserved about money matters, even with

their own family," replied Lady Alicia, with increasing indignation at being thus catechized. "It is not every woman who obtains in her *ménage* the overweening influence enjoyed by my mother. And if to be purchased only by marriage with a man thirty years older than oneself, and at the cost of a life of attorney-work such as I have seen undergone by mama, I am quite content to leave to Mr. Barrington the undisturbed enjoyment of his parchments and banker's book!"

"It strikes me, however, my dear Alice, that if the newspapers tell truth," observed grandmama, "your comings and goings for the last three months (in order to accomplish the great labour of nothing), have taxed your time nearly as much as if you had been at the pains of taking a share in your family concerns. A journey to Doctors' Commons, and a shilling, would have put you in possession of the contents of the will, if your influence over your husband be insufficient to obtain them in a more suitable manner."

"But, surely, dearest grandmama," interposed Lady Sophia, her cheeks suffused with a rising colour, "you would not have my sister obtain by underhand means the information her husband thinks proper to withhold?"

"I would not recommend such measures to *you*, my dear; and to you, Sophy, they would never have been necessary. But Alicia affects the strong woman—the woman to whom all arms are available in self-defence; and among these, I do not consider the facilities afforded by one of our national institutions the most objectionable."

"I am content to take my fortunes as they reach me, without troubling myself about their origin,—just as I do not think it necessary to pull up yonder beautiful rose-tree to examine the form of its roots," said Lady Alicia, with a smile. "We have five thousand a year; we are to inherit another thousand at the death of Mr. Barrington's parents; and, having no country place to keep up, such an income enables us to live handsomely in town."

"To entertain your friends brilliantly during the season, and live upon them the rest of the year! Is not that it?" was the cool commentary of the dowager. "The system is not a new one among people having no seat of their own."

"To visit my husband's family or mine, at their country

residence, my dear madam," replied her granddaughter, with some *hauteur*, "can scarcely be termed living on one's friends!"

"Have you ever thought of inviting your father and mother-in-law to come and stay with you here?" demanded the matter-of-fact dowager.

"Mr. Barrington is a man who detests London," replied her granddaughter. "But with respect to visiting him, he gave me a general invitation to Easton, at the time of my marriage."

"By which you have shown wonderful alacrity to profit!"

"Dear grandmama! Alice will fancy you are displeased with her!" interposed Lady Sophia, perceiving from certain inflations of the nostril, familiar of old to Lady Alicia's sisters, that the chafings of her temper were becoming greater than were likely to be controlled by the authority of a grandmother, of whom she was now independent.

"No—not displeased, my dear. She has acted precisely as I expected. I have no right to be displeased."

"I can scarcely imagine any just cause for displeasure," said Lady Alicia with some dignity, "in my having surrounded myself with the best society in London, and given offence to no one."

"The best company, my dear, is the most *suitable*," replied the dowager, undismayed by the grandeur of her airs. "I quite agree with the public (whose opinion, strange to say, reaches even as far as Warleigh!) that you were not called upon, as the wife of a squire, with (according to your own account) a life income of five thousand a year, to entertain the same personages whom your father, as the second marquis in the kingdom, was bound to receive at his table."

"I rather think," observed Lady Alicia, in a tone of exultation, which not even the strictures of the dowager had power to repress; "I rather think that a considerable number of *my* guests are known only by name, at Heriford House."

"I believe you, my dear, I believe you, and so much the worse! What in the world is there, Alicia, in your condition or talents, to place you on a level with the Cabinet Ministers and Ambassadors you have been gathering together, by hook or by crook, at your table? You are a young

woman of moderate understanding, or you would not have acted with so much precipitation, as to allow your ambition of forming a *salon politique* to be found out, so as to authorize those who know that Rome was not built in a day, to laugh at you in their sleeve, as they did at Aguado the speculator, for fancying he could improvisate a gallery of the old masters !”

“The sneers of all London would do nothing to disprove the fact that my house is frequented by the leading men of the day,” persisted Lady Alicia, not a little nettled.

“Not frequented,—do not mistake yourself, my dear !” persevered grandmama, with her usual provoking firmness.

“When you ask them to dinner, they dine with you—to meet each other at a table where they are sure of good cheer. They do not, and never *will*, come to you gratuitously, and again and again, as they used to Princess L— and Lady H., whose houses *were* ‘frequented,’ because they were those of an Ambassador and Cabinet Minister, or leader of the Opposition. In *their* hands was power. *Their* talking tended to action. But the utmost your endeavours will accomplish is a sterile copy, the Dalmatic robe of empire, stuffed with straw ! Sorry work, my dear Alicia, for a grown-up baby of your age, to be playing at make-believe diplomacy !”

To divert the attention of her angry sister, Lady Sophia began to question her about their family interests.

“Blanche and Mary are looking well, and seem in excellent spirits,” said she.

“Ay, ay ! Because by the removal of two elder sisters,” interrupted grandmama, drily, “they have *continued* to the head of the house. But for your marriage, Alice and Sople’s consenting to keep the old woman company, they might have waited for the next ten years for any thing better than a back seat in their mother’s carriage or opera box !”

“I hear nothing of Sir Wolseley Maitland, this year ?” said Sophia, interrogatively, and, as if in relation to her sister Mary.

“He is in Ireland.”

“On a visit to his estates, instead of wasting the season in London ? Then there may be good in him after all.”

"I am sorry to clip the wings of your Quixotism," said Lady Alicia, still half sullen from the lesson she had received. "Sir Wolseley is simply gone salmon-fishing."

"I cannot say he was ever a great favourite of mine," added her sister; "but Mary seemed to like him, and mama thought it an advantageous match."

"At present, Mary scarcely knows what she likes," replied Lady Alicia, "except flirting and folly. I am sorry to say the intimacy with Harry Rubric is greater than ever."

"Rubric? A son of Lord Greatithe's?" inquired grandmama; "the man with that fine preferment at his disposal?"

"Yes, but unluckily his family is as large as his patronage," replied Lady Alicia. "Poor Mary fancies that, because Lord Greatithe can give livings, instead of estates, to his sons, they are sure of rising to be dignitaries in the church, and dreams of nothing but lawn sleeves. Yesterday, she asked me, seriously, how many of the bishops had palaces in London, and whether it would be thought odd for a bishop's wife to dance!"

"Mary was always a giddy, prating girl!" said Lady Kilsythe, with an air of disgust, apparently conceiving it impossible such a question could have been asked in earnest. "I am glad she did not marry young Maitland! *His* was not the character to improve her. Bad blood those Maitlands; the men, boors, and of the women, the less said the better!"

"I assure you, dear grandmama, the world finds much that is agreeable to say of Lady Mortayne," observed Lady Alicia, glad of an excuse to disagree with the dowager, though on a point where their opinions coincided.

"I am glad to hear it, my dear. It will require a great deal of merit on her own and her brother's part, to efface the memory of their mother, one of the worst women that ever breathed!"

Lady Sophia, who had seldom heard grandmama thus acrimonious, could not forbear whispering—"We must not, however, forget that she is a relation."

"That we have never forgotten it, Sophy, is sufficiently

proved by the kindness of your mother, in introducing her daughter to the world," replied Lady Kilsythe, sternly. "For it *was* a sacrifice, I can assure you."

"Poor Eleanor's situation was so friendless!" pleaded Lady Sophia, "left solely to the mercy of that selfish, thoughtless brother!"

"Ay, poor thing, deplorable enough!" rejoined the dowager; "her father dead, and her mother worse than dead!"

"Is Lady Maitland then, still alive?" demanded Lady Sophia, with some interest.

"Do not call her Lady Maitland, my dear. She was divorced twenty years ago!"

"Yes, I am aware of that. But not knowing what name she has since assumed——"

"She was divorced, I think, for running away with Colonel Grimston, of the Guards?" said Lady Alicia, who piqued herself on knowing everything about everybody;—"that grey-headed General Grimston whom one sees at the Ancient Concert."

"Sir *Robert* Grimston. But he, you know, my dear Alice, is married to one of the sisters of Sir Alan Harkesley," observed Sophia.

"Colonel Grimston's connexion with our wretched relative was a very momentary affair," said Lady Kilsythe; "only sufficient to deprive *him* of public respect and ten thousand pounds, and to secure *her* being divorced by Sir John. But it is both imprudent and repugnant to inquire into the history of such people! The lesson afforded is often dearly bought; for I scarcely ever knew a woman who renounced her place in society, that did not prove herself incapable of understanding its value, by falling fifty fathoms lower than her original fall: as in some noble structure, when a single column gives way, the whole edifice is in danger."

"Lady Maitland, then, has disgraced herself since her divorce?" demanded Lady Alicia, to whom the modern instances of grandmama were less insupportable than her wise saws.

"I requested you before, my dear Alicia, not to describe

her by the name of Lady Maitland! She has been known for some years by the name of Comtesse de St. Chamond."

"*Comtesse de St. Chamond?*" reiterated Lady Alicia, with an air of the most profound amazement.

"Perhaps you came across her during your visit to Paris?"—rejoined old Lady Kilsythe. "But no, it is scarcely possible!—For when, ten years ago, at the request of one of her sisters who was then living, your mother commissioned the Comte de Choiseul (who, when attached to the French embassy, used frequently to be staying at Greensells), to make inquiries, he was forced to apprise us that, after taking up her residence abroad, she had fallen into the worst hands and the lowest depths of infamy. After all we heard, it would have been a relief had further tidings satisfied us that she was no more."

"The Comtesse de St. Chamond!" was all that Lady Alicia still articulated. But it was evidently a mechanical ejaculation, connected with some inward struggle of emotion.

"And is it likely that poor Lady Mortayne should be aware of these grievous particulars?" inquired Lady Sophia, with an air of genuine sympathy.

"I rather think not. My daughter exacted of the Count to keep secret the result of his inquiries; and it is generally believed among her former friends that this unfortunate woman is no more. Sir John Maitland, who, to his dying day, retained the bitterest spirit of animosity against one who had dishonoured himself and his children, and never spared them the shame of hearing her name coupled with the most fearful epithets, dwelt only on her delinquencies with reference to Colonel Grimston; and, if aware of all she had become, would not, I suspect, have confined his invectives within such narrow bounds."

"And you are quite certain, dear grandmama," persisted Lady Alicia, "that the mother of Eleanor and Sir Wolseley, now goes by the name of the Comtesse de St. Chamond?"

"Quite certain. But in what way does it interest *you*, my dear, since it appears certain that Sir Wolseley has no thoughts of proposing to your sister Mary?"

"I was only trying to find excuses in such parentage for

the levity of Lady Mortayne's character," replied Lady Alicia, endeavouring to look unconcerned.

"But surely Eleanor is steadied now?" inquired Sophia, becoming more interested in the subject of conversation.

"What do you mean by steadied *now*?" reiterated her sister. "It is only recently that opportunities for levity have been afforded her. Any silly flirtation in which she indulged last season, arose from girlishness—from lightness of heart. But to flirt as the wife of Lord Mortayne—of a man so much older than herself—lays her open, of course, to the suspicions and animadversions of the world."

"And *does* she flirt as the wife of Mortayne?" again inquired Sophia, with a face of the utmost concern.

"Nay, my dear Sophy, if you can find nothing better to discuss with your sister than the scandals of the season," grandmama was beginning in her turn—

"Do not be afraid!"—interrupted Lady Alicia, surmising the cause of her uneasiness. "In *this* house, the name of Lady Mortayne is sacred. The utmost I have to say about her is to thank heaven that Clandon resisted our foolish importunities that he would make her his wife. For worlds, would I not have had her for a sister-in-law!"

"I am beginning to think you are never likely to have a sister-in-law!"—cried grandmama, fractiously, rising from her arm-chair with the deliberateness of her age, and accepting the offered arm of Lady Sophia, to make the best of her way to her carriage. "Your mother tells me that her son Henry never leaves the side of that seed of thistledown (and therefore, perhaps, the fitter food for him!)—Lady Barbara Bernardo; while as to Clandon, I find he has never shown his face in society this season!"

"I can, at least, certify that he never comes *here*!" replied Lady Alicia:—"but *that* I attribute to the slyness he perhaps feels towards my husband. He may fancy that Mr. Barrington is inclined to take in ill-part his conduct towards his cousin."

"Whose conduct?—Clandon's?"

"No one can deny that, for so shy and reserved a man, my brother flirted outrageously with Miss Brenton! And though, at the time, he meant, of course, nothing but to

render his stay at a place so dull as Greensells less insupportable, as things have turned out, she would not have been so bad a match for him after all."

The tapping of the dowager's high-heeled shoes, as she was making towards the door, ceased suddenly, as she stopped short and faced about to Lady Alicia, to see if she were speaking in earnest: and there was certainly no appearance of her ladyship's observations being ironical.

"I never thought you much of a wiseacre, my dear Alice!" said the old lady, peering into her face, and patting her on the arm with the long bamboo handle of the parasol that served her for a walking-stick. "But I did not fancy that your brother had so little confidence in you as to leave you thus completely at the bottom of the basket!—Miss Barrington refused him ages ago——"

"Refused him?—Refused *Clandon*?"

"Refused, (you would say, if you dare,) 'a marquis expectant of eleven descents!'"

"She was afraid, perhaps, that he was attracted by her fine fortune!" said Lady Alicia, thinking aloud.

"No, no, my dear;—you must fish out some other motive!" said the old lady.

"The proposal was made and declined," added Lady Sophia, "while Miss Brenton was still the humble Cinderella of Easton Hco."

"You were his confidant, then, Sophy?" cried Lady Alicia, in a resentful tone.

"The confidant only of his wretchedness, at the moment of his disappointment. Had he consulted me beforehand, I should scarcely have advised his risking the proposal;—so certain was I that it would be useless."

"And why, pray?"

"One cannot always assign a reason for one's convictions. But, when Clandon arrived one day, unexpectedly, at Warleigh (while you were abroad), and told me he was come to acquaint me with the bitterest mortification of his life, I answered at once,—'Spare yourself the grief of repeating it: I know all! You want to marry Mrs. Barrington's pretty niece, and cannot obtain her consent.'"

"And how came you to surmise it? If I remember, *you*

were not of that famous party to Easton Hoo, which was predestined to decide so many destinies ? ”

“ I was one of a still more famous party at Heriford Castle ! ” replied Lady Sophia, with a smile ; and not having quite so many calls on my attention as yourself and Eleanor, was at leisure to perceive how thoroughly my brother was engrossed by his pretty Maria. And Clandon, you know, is a man to be in love but once—and for ever ! ”

Lady Kilsythe, who had been waiting patiently in the lobby at the head of the stairs, to afford the sisters an opportunity for a few last words, now hobbled back again, to claim the arm of Lady Sophia.

“ Good bye, my dear Alice ! ” was her far from affectionate farewell to the lofty lady of the house. “ Make haste and put all your political crotchets out of your head, and try to be a reasonable creature. Leave them to poor Blanche, who, being still in her teens, knows no better, and had set her heart, it seems, on marrying one of the honourable young pen-menders and despatch-spoilers of the nation. Depend upon it, child, this is no moment in the history of the country for a pack of foolish women to mend matters by whispering in the ear of a foreign plenipo or two ; or exchanging nonsensical notes with some ultramontane Majesty on his travels. Better stick to your distaff, my dear,—better stick to your distaff ! The finest translation of *Ne sutor ultra crepidam* is, ‘ No woman beyond her worsted work ! ’ ”

CHAPTER XXIX.

Une dame de grand cœur, qui couve une vindication, est fort à craindre.—BRANTOME.

EAGERLY did Lady Alicia long to find herself once more in presence of her husband. She had mysteries to unfathom almost beyond the controlment of her powers of discretion ; and though no longer on terms with him to push her interrogatories on points which he seemed inclined to reserve,

she flattered herself that, from his replies to casual observations, her own perspicuity might enable her to extract the information she was desirous to obtain.

Was he, in the first place, aware of the slight that had been offered to Lord Clandon by his cousin? The self-command with which he had submitted to her scornful apostrophe at Paris, while possessing the mean sof silencing her in a moment by the announcement of his accession of fortune, prepared her to suspect that, though not a syllable had escaped his lips in reply to her frequent allusions to "Miss Barrington's prudence in fixing her residence at once at Hexholm, where she was a person of consequence, in preference to hazarding the eclipse,—the insignificance,—the obscurity,—certain to extinguish in London a person destitute of connection with the great world," he had been enjoying, all the time with concentrated malice, the consciousness that by this obscure and insignificant kinswoman, the heir of all the Herifords had been dismissed as a suitor beneath her notice!

But this was not all. Lady Alicia's family affection and family pride were so secondary to her self-estimation, that she was prepared to forgive an insult offered to her brother, far sooner than the merest slight levelled at herself. A suspicion had crossed her mind, that, between Eleanor and her husband, she was made a dupe; and, though conscious that she had no great claim on Charles's affection, she was determined to exact, to the last and utmost, the personal respect which every wife, whose conduct is irreproachable, has a right to claim in her *ménage*.

She had ascertained without much difficulty that the pink note, the original cause of her domestic dissensions,—was from *a* Madame de St. Chamond. On that point, indeed, her husband affected no mystery. In despatching an answer, he had said to the servant, almost within her hearing, and as if braving her, "Give this to the servant of the Comtesse de St. Chamond, who is to call for an answer to the letter left here this morning."

Concluding him to be too well-bred, if not too well-principled, to make a display of correspondence with a woman of disreputable character, Lady Alicia had hastened to inquire of one of the legions of diplomatic *lions* attached to

her circle,—“*who* was the Comtesse de St. Chamond?”—making the inquiry with the same unmysterious nonchalance that would have dictated a similar question concerning a Montmorency or a Grammont.

“Who has dared to mention the name of such a person in your ladyship’s presence?”—was the indignant reply. “*Est-ce qu’on parle de ces espèces-là devant une femme comme-il-faut?*”

Whereupon, heartily ashamed of having committed herself, Lady Alicia was glad to drop the subject, and nurse in the secrecy of her heart her wrath against a husband who had so little consideration for his own respectability and hers.

But she was now beginning to suspect that in this correspondence, Barrington had only been the means of communication between the mother and daughter. Eleanor, who in her girlhood had always spoken of her mother as no more, had perhaps been all this time entertaining with the infamous woman a secret correspondence. Those beautiful French dresses and flowers by which Miss Maitland had formerly excited the envy of the Ladies de Capell, had doubtless been despatched regularly to her from Paris, by the Comtesse de St. Chamond!

But in making the projected attempt, Lady Alicia was forced to admit that her pupil had profited only too aptly by her lessons. Not the shrewdest proprietor of the most petrified face among her diplomatic associates, could have more thoroughly distanced her curiosity than Mr. Barrington, by the frigid reserve into which he retreated against her attack. The moment she pronounced the name of St. Chamond, he seemed to sink into an icehouse.

Inexpressibly vexed,—for his hasty retreat from the room rendered it impossible to persist in her interrogatory,—Lady Alicia determined to renew it on some early occasion; and if he again affected solemn airs of discretion, to tax him in plain terms with the intimacy he had formed at Paris with the worthless mother of Sir Wolseley Maitland.

For in Lady Alicia’s mind, had long been rising one of those progressive tempests so far more deadly in their results than the angry gust of an hour, soon excited, and soon tranquillized. Though the wretched position in which she stood with regard to her husband, was in a great measure of her

own creation, it was not the less hard to be endured. Every one might see,—every one saw,—that she was an object of perfect indifference to Mr. Barrington. But this was not the worst. Every one might see,—and every one saw,—that he lived only in the presence of her fair cousin; that, when sunned in the smiles of Lady Mortayne, he was no longer to be identified with the dispirited man who moped in her drawing-room; or whose surly silence was (she trusted) interpreted into indisposition by the illustrious guests whom he never so much as condescended to lift up his voice for the purpose of entertaining.

Against *this* humiliation, the blood of the De Capells rebelled. In the course of the three short months which constituted her experience of domestic confidence,—a period which, improved upon by a wise and amiable woman, might have been made to last for life,—Charles had vented without scruple his accusations against the coquetry of Eleanor Maitland's character and the shallowness of her heart. But he spoke of her with a degree of bitterness that might have induced a less self-occupied woman than Lady Alicia to apprehend a relapse. He spoke from pique, and not conviction. Even *had* he spoken from conviction, was he not of an age when all the unfavourable prepossessions in the world disappear, like snow in the sunshine, before the smiles of a face so supereminently lovely as that of Lady Mortayne!

Lady Alicia had no personal experience in that supreme power of beauty which renders the resolves of rational and reasoning man subsidiary to the glance of an expressive eye,—to the symmetry of a beautiful hand. Accustomed to assign the preponderating influence to the charm of what Leonora di Galigai has rendered proverbial,—“the power of a strong mind over a weak one,”—she had yet to learn that even the strongest combinations of the strongest minds may be defeated by the blandishments of a fool with a fair face.

On this point, however, she was beginning to be enlightened. She saw her Eleusinian *salon*, in all its glory of foreign and native illustration, deserted by her husband, even at the risk of public reprobation, for the pleasure of sitting silent beside Lady Mortayne in her opera-box; or of figuring with her in the *étourdissant* whirl of a *valse*, at some fashionable ball!

If Eleanor (finding Lord Mortayne engaged,—at Tattersalls,—the Tennis-court,—the House of Lords, or any other of the resorts to which a man of his condition occasionally owes himself,) applied to Mr. Barrington to become her escort to some exhibition of frescoes, or flower-show, or riding-party,—an order in Council would not have prevented him from being in attendance!

All this weighed sorely upon the heart of one, who had but to look at her own face in the glass, to read the apology which the world was assigning for his conduct. At that moment, more especially. For it was not, because, as she quitted home for the continent immediately on her marriage, her beautiful Berengaria (so praised by Sir Wolseley Maitland at Easton Hoo), had fallen to the share of Lady Mary, that she was debarred from joining their equestrian expeditions. Early in the autumn she had the prospect of becoming a mother (an event so touching to the heart of even the least tenderly affectionate woman!) and she was consequently compelled to privations, for which no compensation was felt to be her due by the resentful husband whom she had so thoroughly estranged.

Unaware of her situation at the moment of that bitter dissension which, only three months after their marriage, had alienated the heart of her husband at once and for ever, her wounded pride rendered it difficult to communicate the fact to one who would probably regard it as a mere attempt to reconcile herself with one in whom she so unexpectedly beheld a favourite of fortune. Not an allusion, therefore, had she made to the subject,—however much indisposed,—however fatigued by travelling or exertions in her own house—till nature rendered her situation unconcealable; when, in answer to his expression of a desire to spend the autumn in a foreign tour, she observed that he could not do better,—but that “*she* must remain in England,—since, in September, she expected to be confined.”

Whether the savage rejoinder of “What a bore!” that escaped the lips of her husband, were expressly intended to punish the haughty obduracy with which she had persisted in concealing the fact, or whether the genuine expression of his selfish calculations, the heartache of Lady Alicia was the same. From physical influences she was now often

sad,—often desponding; and even her ambitious spirit was forced to admit that there are moments in human life when human sympathy becomes indispensable; and that the homage of all the stars and garters,—*Toisons d'or* and *St. Esprits* in the world, was poor requital for the want of affectionate female companionship;—the younger sisters cooled towards her by her scornful disposition, and the indifference to their interests she had evinced since her marriage,—and the fair kinswoman converted into an enemy by treachery and fraud.

It was in a mental paroxysm produced by involuntary recognition of these disagreeable truths (as she was driving along Park Lane, nearly at the close of the season, on her way home to Arlington Street, after calling at the French embassy, where the intimation of the departure for Paris of the ambassadress created another gap in the social circle from which the gems were gradually dropping away), that a feeling of jealousy against Lady Mortayne, almost amounting to frenzy, took possession of her soul.

Feverish and irritable from the oppression of the weather, she had proposed that morning to her husband (when he visited her drawing-room previous to repairing to his club, to examine the *programme* of their engagements for the day), to walk with her in the Botanic Garden in the Regent's Park; a promenade so little within reach of fashionable inquisition, as to secure him against being quizzed by her brother Henry or Lord Newbury, concerning the humdrum nature of his *tête-à-tête*.

But, to her mortification,—a little, too, to her surprise (for, since his attentions to Lady Mortayne had exposed them both to the danger of public disapproval, he had been scrupulously courteous towards his wife, as though to deprecate her joining the ranks of the opposition), he excused himself from the walk.

“Some other day, he should be very happy. But he had an engagement from five till eight, that rendered it impossible.”

Involuntarily, his wife glanced from the window across the park,—overhung at that moment by the sort of oppressive haze which, in July, often renders the atmosphere of London as sultry as that of a blast-furnace,—as though to remind him

of her peculiar occasion for the refreshment of the lighter climate of Northern London.

But the vapours of Pimlico might have risen around them, black and stifling as from a lime-kiln, and it would have made no difference. Having announced an engagement and taken up his hat, a London man considers himself entitled to stand his ground against *any* commotion,—his wife, or an earthquake.

Reared in a numerous family, Lady Alicia was little in the habit of attempting any kind of expedition alone. To *her*, such an exertion appeared as impossible as it was to the unfortunate princesses, the aunts of Louis XVI., to make their way down stairs without the arm of a gentleman-usher to afford them support. The walk so desired was consequently abandoned, and a round of visits adopted instead;—a round of visits, not of the friendly order that warms and regenerates the heart, but a cold card-leaving ceremony, purporting to conciliate a few great personages, with whom she was desirous of appearing on friendly terms.

The last effort of this deposit of crocodile's eggs having brought her Connaught-place-wise, down Park Lane, towards Arlington Street, she was reclining in the corner of her carriage, chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancies (but, alas! far more bitter than sweet)—when one of those groups of pleased and proud equestrians, of which, the preceding season, she had so often formed a part, turned leisurely from Rotten Row to make the round of the ring;—all admirably mounted,—from the lady who reined, with a grace peculiarly her own, a black barb, well-known by sight to the jealous owner of Berengaria, down to the three or four grooms that followed far in the rear;—gossiping together with more *à plomb* than even their masters.

One of the grooms wore the Barrington livery; a sufficient intimation, even without the sickening consciousness weighing like lead upon her heart, that the cavalier on the off side of Lady Mortayne,—the cavalier in whose favour all the rest of the party were disregarded,—was no other than her husband.

Such then was his engagement!—Such his motive for setting *her* health and comfort at nought!

At that moment, had the black barb reared and fallen backwards, crushing its mistress in the fall, the cry that might have escaped the lips of Lady Alicia at the terrible spectacle would have been of exultation rather than pity. At that moment she *loathed* the triumphant beauty, in the light of whose smiles the enamoured Charles Barrington was evidently content to live and die!

A moment afterwards, she caught sight of three persons riding exactly at the same distance from the front rank as the grooms lagged in the rear of the whole party;—three men, each of whom had turned the corner of the age defined by Hippocrates as the close of youth; that one of the three who had overstepped it last, was Lord Mortayne, wearing tokens of a far more advanced age than his elder companions Lord Bowbridge and Sir Alan Harkesley.

All three, however, exhibited unmistakable symptoms of the decrepitude of heart and soul (more oppressive than the weariness of mere age), which besets, at the close of the season, the *blasés*, or *dévastés*, or *ennuyés*, or whatever may be the term in fashion for those who are sick to surfeiting of the good things of this world; and who, at the end of July, having eaten and drunk of all that is most out of season, and heard and done all that is most out of reason, for some weeks preceding,—having exhausted the excitement of the Derby, the Oaks, the Ascot cup, and the new ballet,—fall back upon themselves under the oppression of the dog-days, like a collapsed balloon whose elasticity is exhausted.

With the perspicuous glance of a woman of the world, Lady Alicia instantly discovered that Mortayne was vainly labouring to find conversation for the other two,—*his* Eliphaz and Bildad,—who on *their* parts were endeavouring, the one to console him for being married, the other to discover how he managed to put up with it.

Lady Alicia could perhaps have answered the question to Sir Alan Harkesley as satisfactorily as his own observations; for she, too, made it her study to ascertain what was passing in the mind of Eleanor's husband. No one had noticed, as *she* had, his air of mournful concern,—as of remorse, not for a crime, but for a fault! No one but herself perceived that in recognising the folly of his marriage, he was far more

angry with himself than with his wife; or that he was still convinced that, young, rich, beautiful, highly connected, she had chosen him for his own sake, and from personal preference. It had depended on herself to make a better match. If unhappy, he was not ungrateful.

Even when noticing with regret what he must have been blind to avoid seeing, the growing intimacy between his wife and Barrington, Lady Alicia saw, with indignation, that his countenance,—that expressive and elegant countenance,—acknowledged, more in sorrow than in anger, his perception of the fact. It was himself, and not Eleanor, whom he accused.

“Had this poor girl found me the same eager, fond, devoted worshipper as at first,” was his sad reflection,—“she would have had no leisure to look abroad for change. But conscious of having been treated like a toy, and prized no longer when the gloss of novelty was worn off, her ear is naturally captivated by protestations that remind of mine, which she hears no longer. Poor Eleanor! It is only doubly my duty to watch over her and protect her from harm; and with unwearied care withdraw her from the perils of the world, without alienating her confidence by a show of misplaced severity.”

By degrees, when he saw that, afford what encouragement she might to Charles Barrington, a place was always kept for *him* by her side, to which he was welcomed with smiles as ingratiating as of yore, and that it was apparently in the simplicity of her heart she gave herself up to the flirtation which did her so much injury in the eyes of society,—he redoubled his efforts, not alone to win back her wandering fancy, but to conciliate in her favour the women of his set, who he saw were beginning to look on with a smile. He condescended to flatter the Duchess of Nantwich,—to gossip with Lady Bowbridge,—and to listen with patience to the affected jargon of half-a-dozen others, only that they might deal mercifully with the poor Eleanor whom he had introduced into the fatal jurisdiction of their tribunal.

But he did more than all this. He conquered his disgust towards that unwomanly specimen of female nature, Lady

Alicia, whom, in former days, during his brief flirtation with her sister, he had detested as hard, *prétentionnée*, and ambitious; and, wherever they met, honoured her by a deference of attention, purporting to leave her no leisure for discovering how completely she was neglected by her husband. He dreaded the growth of jealousy in such a nature as hers. He knew that there are certain districts of Arabia, and of human nature, which produce only stones and serpents.

The manly tenderness of his disposition—that disposition which had rendered “Morty” so universally beloved—instigated him, in short, to protect the happiness of her who was gone from him. With the persevering devotion of an Orpheus, he trusted to win back his wife from the gloomy regions of perdition.

Satisfied, therefore, of her hold over him, Lady Alicia felt that, whenever or wherever she pleased, she had only to mark her desire to converse with him to retain him by her side. To enlighten his blindness, opportunities for the mischief she meditated would not be wanting.

Lord Mortayne should be placed upon his guard. Lord Mortayne should learn the pure nature of the blood coursing through the blue veins that adorned the ivory skin in which his eyes delighted. The mother of Eleanor had, doubtless, been described to him, as to others, as having expiated her frailties by death. He should be taught better. He should be instructed that, in the infamous career that mother was pursuing, she was not only supported by the recognition of the daughter of Sir John Maitland, but that it was by the hands of that daughter's devoted admirer the illicit correspondence was carried on.

As the group of equestrians disappeared afar off into the haze which even the coppery gleams of the setting sun rendered only semi-transparent, secure and happy in themselves and each other—talking of operas and ballets—forced peaches—*fromage de glace à la rose*—regattas—new novels and old flirtations—

As if earth contained no tomb,
and life no business more urgent than the dinners they were

preparing to eat, and the ball at Heriford House, to which they were afterwards invited—an evil eye was fixed upon them.

A heart as cruel as that of Philip of Spain, or Mary of England, or Ali of Janina, had marked them as objects of vengeance.

CHAPTER XXX.

I know them,
And what they weigh, even to the utmost scruple;
Scambling, out-facing, fashion-mongering fools,
That lie, and cog, and flout, deprave and slander.

SHAKESPEARE.

“WHAT a charming ball!” cried Lord Bowbridge, who was apt to find those things charming on which the reflection of his own happy temper streamed like sunbeams on a harvest-field. “Heriford House is one of the few in London in which people should pretend to give a ball.”

“I do not agree with you,” rejoined Sir John Hildyard, to whom he was addressing himself, as they stood aloof from the throng—pretty nearly on the spot occupied by Charles Barrington and the *débutante* when first introduced to the reader. “It is a fine old house, but too solemn for a *fête*. There is a style of old-fashioned grandeur about it that reminds one of the British Museum.”

“Henry!” exclaimed Lord Bowbridge, endeavouring to snatch the arm of Lord Henry de Capell, as he just then passed on to the ball-room, “here’s Hildyard says that Heriford House always puts him in mind of——”

“Don’t be a fool, Bowbridge!” rejoined Sir John Hildyard, quietly drawing him back to his place, while Lord Henry, after a staring look of wonder at being thus roughly seized upon, passed hastily on—“Henry de Capell is too wise to listen to any one’s impertinence but his own.”

“What you said was not impertinent, my dear fellow, but pertinent.”

“The greater the truth, you know, the greater the libel.

Seriously, this house *does* strike me as totally incongruous with Jullien's band. The heavy-painted ball-room, with its sprawling gods and goddesses, looks as if nothing but minuets should be danced under its domed ceiling. Even leaning against these gilded window-shutters, it seems as though we ought to be criticizing the measures of Lord North rather than of Sir Robert Peel; or at least of t'other Sir Robert—the Sir Robert who bought his adherents instead of selling them, like him we wot of."

"Ha, ha, ha! Alfred, what do you think Hildyard says? That Sir Robert——"

But again, the man who was too open-hearted to keep even a joke to himself, was quietly drawn back to his place.

"I suspect," resumed Hildyard, by way of occupying his lordship's attention, "that what makes you fancy the ball so gay to-night——"

"Well, it certainly *is* more brilliant than the balls used to be here last year."

"Exactly!—is the translation to a higher see of Lady Alicia and Lady Sophia—who were sad killjoys. Lady Mary is a buoyant, spirited creature, with more of the lights than the shadows of human feeling in her face and nature."

"The pleasantest girl in London,—and I can't think what Wolseley Maitland meant by not marrying her!"

"He meant, probably, that he found himself happier single."

"Yes—Maitland is one of those fellows who take such confounded good care of themselves, that they end by marrying a chorus-singer!"

"I am not sure that I would not sooner marry a chorus-singer," replied Sir John, gravely, "than a raw-boned ter-magant, like Lady Alicia Barrington,—whom such animals as Bernardo call 'a fine aristocratic looking woman'—simply because she has features large enough for one of the colossal sphinxes at Thebes. At the end of such a woman's fingers, I always expect to find the claws of a harpy!"

"By Jove, old fellow, I am beginning to believe that *you* are the person who set poor Morty against Lady Sophia!" said Bowbridge, in a momentous whisper.

"And what then?" demanded Sir John, without shrinking an inch from his responsibilities. "I merely advised

him to have those tremendous teeth of hers drawn before he married; and asked leave to cool myself sometimes under the shadow of her prodigious altitudes, in cherry-ripe season, when the dog-star was raging!"

"Precisely! You quizzed him out of his liking for her; as you and I and others have done fifty times to fifty other men concerning women who would have made them happy."

"And which we have left undone, unluckily, about women likely to make them *unhappy*! Morty's marriage was scuffled over in the country. But, depend upon it, had I been within reach of him, he would not now be the miserable man you see yonder, looking nearly as ancient as Old Vassall!"

"I can't say much for his looks, poor fellow! But he was never the same man after he returned from the East."

"Had he not felt himself an altered one he would never have *gone* there! The fact is, Morty was not intended by nature for domestication. Morty is like Byron, and a vast number of other fine organizations, too fastidious for his own happiness. Instead of giving himself up to the force of a current or influence of a feeling, he is always stopping short to examine and inquire, and make sure that he is enjoying the right kind of happiness, in the right kind of way. Were he to dream, to-night, of being at the

Glorious feast from Persia won;

or a banquet in

The golden prime of good Haroun Al Raschid,

he would instantly pinch his finger, to ascertain whether he were awake, and so dissolve the spell. Such a man should never marry!"

"So he has begun to find out, I fear. Poor Morty! Morty is a glorious fellow. I would sooner almost any thing should happen, than harm to Morty."

"Then tell your beads for him at this moment!" rejoined Sir John Hildyard, with a smile; "for he 'lies among the Moors.' Lady Alicia has bound him down in the chair of torment beside the head of the sofa where she sits enthroned like Semiramis:—*et sauve qui peut.*"

"I shan't order a mass said to redeem him out of purgatory, on that account!" replied Bowbridge. "Lady Alicia

is reckoned an agreeable woman by those who are fond of dry talking ; and Morty is not one of those who cannot swallow Portugal grapes for the sawdust clinging to them."

"She can be agreeable enough, I admit, when she has a purpose to gain," retorted the uncompromising Sir John ; "like the boa constrictor, that slavers its victims to render them the easier swallowing. But Lady Alicia's nature is as bitter as quassia ! She has never forgiven Providence for making her an ugly woman ; and takes her revenge upon God's better-looking creatures whenever occasion presents itself. I remember her being punished, when a child at Heriford Castle, for sticking pins into her canary birds ! The aviary was getting nearly depopulated, when the governess bethought her of blowing aside the feathers of the dead birds ; when lo ! they had been converted into pin-cushions by the fairy hands of little Lady Alicia !"

"Ugh ! What a trait of character ! Yet it is hardly fair towards grown-up people to recall their childish faults."

"So it is always said when the faults convey indications of crime. But the meritorious qualities of heroes and sages are usually connected by their biographers with early fore-showings, of some kind or other. Judging the Lady Alicia Barrington of to-day, however, simply by the Lady Alicia Barrington of to-day, I shall not be sorry to see Morty out of her clutches."

"By Jove, how white he has turned all of a sudden !" cried Bowbridge, his attention being thus directed towards his friend ; "as pale as a newly-joined cornet after his second bottle of claret."

"I am glad you call that pale,—I call it ghastly !" retorted Hildyard, with a look of grave concern. And he was about to push his way through the stream of guests dividing him from the sofa, and inquire of his friend whether anything ailed him, when Lord Mortayne, who had suddenly quitted his place, came staggering towards them, with much the pace and gesture to be expected of the cornet in the plight adverted to by Lord Bowbridge.

He could not, however, readily reach them, on account of the throng pressing to and from the ball-room ; and during that brief detention, had time, in some degree, to recover his self-possession.

"Push across to this open window, Morty! I am sure you are not well. The room is disgustingly hot!" said Bowbridge, extending his arm between two stuffy dowagers, to assist in drawing Lord Mortayne towards the cooler spot where they were standing.

"Thanks!" faltered Morty, merging through the aperture thus made. "But I am so overcome by the heat, that I had better go home. Will you be kind enough to explain this to Lady Mortayne, if you see her looking for me? But beg her, on no account, to leave the ball before her usual time. All I want is fresh air."

The lips that uttered these few words were so blue, and the eyes that shunned to encounter those of Hildyard and Bowbridge seemed suddenly to have so sunk in their orbits, that the latter, pressing his way through dowagers and all other obstacles, was by his side in a moment to offer his arm.

"Let me help you to find your carriage, or some other person's!" said he; and as Morty had little strength or breath to resist his good-natured proposal, Lord Bowbridge would not leave him till he had procured the use of the Duke of Nantwich's chariot, his own not being ordered till three in the morning.

"Morty talked of the heat of the room, and of being in a high fever," said his lordship, when questioned, on his return to the ball-room, by Sir John Hildyard. "But he took off his glove to give money to the fellows who ran to call up Nantwich's carriage; and, by Jove, when I shook hands with him as he was getting in, he was colder than marble!"

That night, on Lady Mortayne's return from the ball, she found a note, a *kind* note, from her husband, saying that he had retired to rest with a bad headache, in his dressing-room, which was on the ground floor, that he might not disturb her in the morning by his early rising.

"He was going to Brighton by the early train, for four-and-twenty hours, hoping that a vapour bath would get rid of his *migraine*; and was desirous of going alone, because they could not both absent themselves with propriety from the Duchess of Gloucester's concert the following night."

This was a relief to Eleanor,—who, hearing he had gone home ill from the ball, fancied that "ill" meant angry. Nothing could be better imagined than his trip to Brighton.

She only thought that two days' trial of the vapour-bath would be better than one. The message she left for him with the servants, however, was that, unless he wrote to the contrary, she should expect him home to dinner on the second day.

But, although he did not write, he did not make his appearance. Neither circumstance, however, weighed much on the mind of his wife; for people suffering from *migraine* are privileged to be lazy. He was probably suffering from one of the hypochondriacal attacks to which he was subject; which *he* attributed to a relapse of *mal'aria* fever, and his wife to a relapse of the inertness produced by his oriental habits. Better that he should secure his perfect recovery by the bracing of the sea breeze.

But it was not to Brighton he was gone. That highway of the *ennuyés* of London was not for the stricken deer, who had little hope of the assuagement of a wound like his from the mere levities of life. It must be healed in solitude. It must be healed by his own efforts; if indeed that bleeding heart were ever again to be made whole!

Yearning after the solitudes of his northern home, and having secured himself from molestation on his journey by hiring the *coupé* so far as the railway conveyed him on his road, he was a hundred miles distant from London by the time the fair Eleanor opened her eyes to the light of another day, and heard, in answer to her inquiries, that "My Lord, as he had announced the night before, had started for the station at seven o'clock." *What* station, was a matter of unconcern both to the lady and the lady's-maid.

On his arrival at Mortayne, the following morning at daybreak, where Mrs. Gairey, the head-keeper's wife, who remained in charge of the house, was called out of her bed to welcome and make coffee for her lord,—after complaining, as such persons are apt to do, of not having been warned of my lord's coming (so that her neglects during his absence might be repaired before they were exposed to the detection of *l'œil du maître*), the delight of seeing again so unexpectedly the master beloved by every human being in his service, prompted her to add, that "It put her in mind of old times, his coming unbeknownt like, and taking everybody unawarr!"

But on glancing at his face as he reclined in the great library chair embroidered with his arms by Lady Mortayne (on which Mrs. Gairey had never found leisure, since the departure of the family, to place the cover, according to my lord's express orders), she saw that she must not talk of old times; so different were his lordship's present haggard looks, from those of the joyous being for whom she used to be called up to make a fire when he arrived suddenly with some friend, to enjoy a few days' shooting, or sport with the otter hounds of the district. The life was gone out of him. The unhappy man before her was but a shadow of Lord Mortayne.

The sympathizing zeal of poor Mrs. Gairey was at least easier to dispose of than the officiousness of the waiters of a Brighton hotel. When my lord had intimated to her that "he wished to be alone,—that no one was to be admitted to him,—that no one was to intrude upon him,—that he was come but for a visit of four-and-twenty hours, and wished to be wholly unmolested," his solitude was as secure as in the heart of the great Pyramid.

"No doubt there's been a breeze 'twixt my lord and lady, and he be com'd down to cool abit!" was Mrs. Gairey's soliloquy over the grouts of the mocha she had been brewing. "Well, they han't lost no time; for when sobe they left the manor, God knows they was as thick as a swarm o' bees!"

In the course of the day, more than one party of that savage order of tourists who persist in visiting the fields and floods when clad in their vernal glories, though Parliament be prattling and the opera fiddling in town, were inexpressibly mortified at being answered, on application at the lodge for leave to visit the beautiful pleasure-grounds of the manor (one of the lions of Lake-land), that "nubbody couldn't on no account be admitted, 'caus' my lord was down." And little did those who went their ways, grumbling, conjecture the solace that was afforded to the lord of the soil by the silence of those tranquil shrubberies,—by the soothing voice of the lonely waterfall!

He had come down, doubting whether he had a right to live,—doubting whether, even if he resisted the desire of his distracted mind to put an end to the struggle of corroding thoughts which, for the last day and night, had tortured him as with the self-judgment of a condemned

cell, by rushing from the retributive justice of his conscience to the tribunal that would render it eternal,—he should have strength of mind ever again to return to his desecrated home,—ever again to afflict his eyes by the sight of his unfortunate wife.

He had never pretended to superior sanctity. But it was not till the present crisis of his fate he had taken an accurate survey of the thing he was. Measuring himself by the customs of the society in which he lived rather than by the holy canons he infringed, or the purity of Him in whose sight it behoved him to be pure, he had often assured himself that, if a *roué*, he was no worse than his neighbours. As a libertine, he was exceeded by the Duke of Nantwich, —as a spendthrift, he was surpassed by Bowbridge; and Harkesley, Lord Alfred, Esher, Hildyard, twenty, fifty, a hundred other men, were more careless in their duties, and more hardened in impenitence.

But it was not till now—when, amidst the social order of modern civilization and under the enlightenment of the Christian dispensation, he found himself guilty of a crime which, even in the lawlessness of the antique world, was represented as the result of some cleaving curse of the elder gods, and visited by the vengeance of the furies—that he learned to tremble while contemplating the profligacy of his career.

At first, as he paced along the weedy gravel of those deserted shrubberies, every object around him seemed tinged with the jaundiced hues of his own meditations. His pulses throbbed, and the parching of fever was upon his lips. Every sense seemed clogged. Every glance appeared to communicate the nauseous tinge of corruption to the lovely scene around him.

But by degrees, as the summer atmosphere breathed healingly upon his brow, and the beauty and stillness of the landscape argued to his inmost soul of the beneficence of its great Creator who sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust, the despondency of the horror-stricken man gave way. He was able to see extenuation, where before all was dark. His sin had been one of ignorance. He had not *wittingly* taken to his arms the daughter of one who had long abided there in shame. As to putting away

privily the wife to whom this horrible disclosure would doubtless be a sentence of death, it would be a wanton aggravation of every former injury. His motive was one that could not be adduced; and the world, which seizes so readily on the slightest pretext to brand disgrace upon a brow so fair as that of Eleanor, would doubtless attribute to vengeance against her girlish follies, what was in fact an act of atonement dictated by an unquiet conscience. No! he had no right to make her pay the penalty of his fault. He had no right to make her walk barefoot, like the Saxon queen, over the burning ploughshares of human malice.

That young creature, whose life was still before her—that young creature, for whom the lovely scenery around him, and the birds that were chanting their summer song so exultingly, had still a charm—*must* not be made a mark for the scorn of the scorner!

It would suffice that, thenceforward, they lived under one roof, but in estrangement. Eleanor would doubtless attribute his conduct to caprice—to the wilfulness of a despotic temper, or the peevishness of ill-health. The truth could never present itself to her unsullied thoughts. She believed her mother to be dead; and to that mother he would address such an admonition, as must render it impossible that the execrable truth should ever transpire further. For himself, would not his youthful excesses be sufficiently punished by the clinging consciousness eating for ever, like a vulture, into his heart!

Meanwhile the malicious originator of all this misery, who, in her purpose of mortifying Mortayne by the knowledge of being united to the daughter of a woman still living a life of shame, was far from suspecting of how frightful a visitation of divine vengeance she had made herself the instrument, could scarcely recover her amazement at the degree of emotion her communication had drawn forth.

In the course of a conversation of which she had herself held the helm, after adverting to the annoyance of being compelled to pass a portion of the autumn in town, she added that she anticipated some compensation from being in Paris by Christmas.

“Paris was the only spot on earth unattainable by the

dreariness of winter! Paris was the only place on earth that reconciled, in their utmost perfection, every physical and intellectual enjoyment. What eating, what drinking, what talking, what music, what dancing, and above all, what a charm of *laissez aller*, redoubling all other enjoyments. Surely, Lord Mortayne," added she, as if at the instigation of the moment,—“you will take Eleanor to Paris next winter, instead of burying her alive in your family owl's nest? But I forgot!” continued Lady Alicia, interrupting herself. “On Madame de St. Chamond's account, a sojourn in Paris would be impossible.”

At this audacious allusion, a sudden flush rose upon the cheeks of her auditor. For the name of Madame de St. Chamond recalled to him only a woman with whom, eight years before, he had wasted a Carnival, in the full tide of vain and vicious dissipation.

More angry than hurt at Lady Alicia's ill-bred allusion, he did not spare her in return.

“The name you have pronounced,” said he—“which I certainly never expected to hear from the lips of a lady in society——”

“Nay,” interrupted Lady Alicia, “I thought it would be less offensive to *you*, as Eleanor's husband, than to hear the unfortunate woman mentioned by the name of Lady Maitland—to which, indeed, by her divorce, she forfeited all title.”

“Divorce! *Lady Maitland!*”—ejaculated Mortayne, precisely in the tone of consternation anticipated by his companion.

“Surely you are aware,” she continued, with serene plausibility, “that the wife of the late Sir Johu Maitland—the mother, in short, of my cousins, Sir Wolseley and Eleanor,—now goes by the name of Comtesse de St. Chamond?”

“Not *the* Comtesse de St. Chamond?” reiterated Mortayne, cold dews of horror starting from his forehead.

“*The* Madame de St. Chamond, I am afraid we must call her, if the name convey pre-eminence in notoriety and vice. But I refer you to Mr. Barrington upon the subject. He will convince you with stronger demonstration than *I* can, that Lady Mortayne's unfortunate mother is still one

of the most remarkable—features must I call it?—of the licentious orgies of Paris.”

Though the groan which escaped the lips of Mortayne at this intimation was only precisely what she expected—like the burst of agony which a surgeon is prepared to hear from the lips of his patient during some agonizing operation—Lady Alicia felt a little alarmed on seeing him rise suddenly and stagger across the room to Hildyard and Bowbridge; then, leaning on the arm of the latter, quit the spot. She was afraid lest, in the height of his anguish, he might betray himself—and with himself *her*; for to what other person could he ascribe the information he had received?

She began to repent, too, having referred him to her husband. What would be the exasperation of Mr. Barrington, if appealed to for confirmation of a fact so injurious to the credit and interests of his idolized Eleanor!

At all events, it was indispensable to be beforehand with the possibility of such an evil; and when, the following day, Charles Barrington was going through his quotidian ceremony of inquiring their engagements, with the best intention of breaking as many as decency would allow of those they had to fulfil together,—Lady Alicia expressed a wish to go the following evening to the French play, solely as a pretext to add,—“I want to see the new actress,—Madame de Saint Felix—Saint Marc—*Saint Chamond*,—what is her name? All those sort of people add a *Saint* to their name,—as Lord Mortayne was observing to me last night.”

“*What* was Mortayne observing to you last night?” demanded her husband, assuming one of those straight-forward attitudes that ensure an explicit reply.

“Simply what I just now stated:—that in Paris, women of disreputable character are apt to call themselves *Saint*—something, as a *nom de guerre*.”

Her husband looked into her face as steadily as though striving to penetrate the inmost recesses of her brain.

“You are not altogether ingenuous with me,” said he, at the close of his investigation. “But with *you*, Lady Alicia, it is necessary I should be candid. It is not often I interfere with your purposes or pleasures; nor have I a

sincerer desire than that you should enjoy to the utmost such satisfactions as my fortune can procure you. But in return, when I *do* express a wish, I expect it to be attended to."

Nervous and conscience-stricken, Lady Alicia uttered not a syllable. Her genius for retort was overmastered.

"I suspect," resumed her husband, "that, by some means or other, you have obtained possession of a secret, which it is important to the happiness of more than one person in whom I am interested, should be preserved inviolate,—especially as regards Mortayne. If *he* should obtain knowledge of a circumstance which *you* perhaps regard only as a subject for tittle-tattle, it must lead to such results as would make the discloser curse the day he was born."

From the conscious air of his wife, Charles Barrington entertained little doubt that the mischief was done.

"Understand, therefore, once for all, Lady Alicia," said he, preparing to leave the room, "that I make you responsible for whatever evils may ensue from disregard of my request that you will never breathe to Lord Mortayne the smallest intimation of the relationship to which you have alluded."

He might as well have said, "disobedience to my commands," as "disregard of my request," in so peremptory a tone was his intimation conveyed! For the school of conjugal tyranny in which Charles Barrington had been brought up had found in him an apt scholar; and from the moment Lady Alicia subjected herself to his rebukes by placing herself at Paris so completely in the wrong, he had rigorously maintained his advantage.

When left, therefore, to her reflections,—left to the remembrance of her indiscretion, and the apprehension of what might ensue,—her heart sank within her. An object of personal dislike to her husband, there was no extremity of retribution he might not deal upon her; and the prospect of a separation, if not as grievous to her heart as to any other woman in her situation, was unspeakably galling to her pride. The predictions made six months before by her younger brothers and sisters (only too familiar with the overbearing nature of her temper), that "Alice, and the handsome husband so much younger than herself, whom

she had chosen to marry, would not live together a year," recurred vexatiously to her memory; till, in her panic of anxiety, she almost doubted whether it might not be better to avow all to her husband, and afford Lady Mortayne a chance of averting whatever evils he foresaw from her rash disclosure.

But no!—bold as she was in some things, Lady Alicia wanted courage to tell the truth. To make what might appear an apologetic confession to Eleanor, was a sacrifice greater than even her fears.



CHAPTER XXXI.

Love follows not desert, but accident,
 We love, because we love : I know no more.
 'Tis not great thoughts, nor noble qualities,
 Nor conduct pure, compel it. These rather challenge
 Our deep respect than Love. That sweet emotion
 Owes to our tender hearts its gentle force,
 And scorns all meaner reason.—PROCTOR.

WHILE the paths of these favourites of Fortune were perplexed by thorns of their own planting, and tares of their own sowing, there was not a cloud to intercept the sunshine streaming as with the favour of Heaven upon the roof of Hexholm Hall.

The active duties awaiting the young heiress on her accession of fortune had cut short at once those dangerous reveries—the sunken rocks so perilous to the female heart. Thenceforward, she had little leisure to dwell upon the sayings or doings of the cousin to whose fortunes her being seemed attached, as that of the hamadryad to the oak. There was Mr. Fitzhugh, with his matter-of-fact habits of business, claiming her serious attention. There were lawyers to be consulted,—stewards to be communed with,—tradesmen to be instructed,—neighbours to be conciliated,—tenants to be listened to;—all the thousand

duties, in short, incumbent on a person succeeding to a considerable fortune, and inexperienced in its care and distribution.

To carry out his plans for the restoration of Hexholm, a sum of five-and-twenty thousand pounds had been exempted by Humphrey Barrington from the ulterior settlement of his property, and left to be expended according to the discretion of his executor and taste of his niece. Miss Barrington had, consequently, ample means at her disposal, not alone to complete the furnishing and decoration of the old mansion, but to surround herself with the gardens and conservatories she loved so well.

In the unworthy hands to which the estate had passed when sold off for the benefit of Mr. Barrington's creditors, everything had been suffered to go to ruin. Cattle had been grazing up to the drawing-room windows, and a great portion of the ornamental timber destroyed. To redeem the remainder from injury was her first object. To clothe the property with new plantations, and fringe the outskirts of her farms with the orchards that constitute the wealth of the French peasant, her second.

"I do not desire picturesque cottages or fancy farms," said she in reply to the bantering of Mr. and Mrs. Fitzhugh. "But I want to see those around me comfortable and at their ease. I have a selfish object, moreover, in establishing a nursery-ground at Hexholm to supply these orchards. As I am to spend the spring of the year in the country, I wish to render the landscape as cheerful as possible; to effect which, what equals the early and successive bloom of the fruit-trees,

That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty?"

It could not, however, be with the view of enlivening Hexholm that Miss Barrington caused to be traced out under the windows of the western wing in which she had established her private apartments, a certain design of flower-pots sunk in the greensward, with shrubberies branching off fanwise on either side, so as to leave in the centre a view of the park beyond, which the landscape-

gardener employed by Mr. Fitzhugh assured her was of the most exploded fashion : “ the sort of thing never seen now-a-days, except at some country parsonage ! ”

But Maria persisted. She even gave express and circumstantial orders for the grouping of the shrubs and trees ; *where* the Portugal laurels should be placed,—*where* the hollies, the ilexes, the mountain ashes, the sumachs, the barberry-bushes, and all the other quaint, old-fashioned greeneries, in exchange for which her more fastidious gardener eagerly suggested American plants, magnolias, and carob-trees.

It was not necessary to explain to *him* that the arrangement she required was copied, tree by tree, from the spot she had so long and laboriously cultivated at Easton ; or that, though the carnations, auriculas, geraniums and fuchsias she insisted on having brought into bloom for the *jardinières* of her apartments, had probably been superseded for years in horticultural distinction by plants of the same species having blossoms as large as sunflowers or heads of brocoli, and nearly the same vapid or leguminous smell, they were as dear to *her* as in the days when she used to place them triumphantly on the slopings of the old porch of the Hoo, to welcome her cousin Charles with their fragrance, on his arrival from Eton or Oxford.

Much as was done for her, in short, there remained a great deal to be done by herself. Soon after her establishment at Hexholm, and while still engaged in the amusing task of setting in their places the splendid articles of furniture and objects of *vertù*, collected for her uncle by his friend Fitzhugh, there arrived from Madras bales and bales of interesting objects which, for the last twenty years, poor Humphrey Barrington had been gathering together for the embellishment of Hexholm ; panelling from Japan, services from Tchín Tchew, vases of enamelled porcelain and hangings of silk, embroidered with birds and flowers in rarest perfection,—such as the extensive mercantile connection of the resident at Madras enabled him without difficulty to procure.

All these Eastern treasures had to be arranged and disposed of ; the aviaries and conservatories to be filled, and the family portraits redeemed at his brother's sale, by Hum-

phrey's intervention, to be restored to their places. Every day brought some new occupation,—some pleasant occupation,—some occupation enabling her to unite the duty of submission to the wishes of the dead, with the delight of adorning a spot where the remainder of her days was to elapse in pleasantness and peace. Not a week but added some new attraction to the many, both natural and acquired, united within the ring-fence of Hexholm.

But there were other, and still more urgent, claims on her time. Thirteen years only had elapsed since the departure of the Barringtons from their family place, and the friendships and intimacies of a long-established race had bequeathed permanent traces to the neighbourhood. Several of the county families, nearly connected with them by marriage, hailed with the utmost joy an event that served so unexpectedly to reunite the old estate with the ancient name. A resident family at the venerable mansion was welcomed as a permanent blessing;—for in counties so remote from the metropolis as that of Durham, the duty of annual London-going is by no means obligatory, and in many of the finest houses of the district the chimneys might be found smoking all the year round.

Among these, the memory of the gentle Mrs. Barrington was held in respectful remembrance. Even her husband had been, in his Hexholm days, a far pleasanter companion than the surly uncle recognised by Maria; and as their difficulties had not been of a nature to injure others (every shilling of their liabilities being discharged, so as to occasion no person's ruin but their own), there was no drawback to the pleasure with which the letters of her kind aunt, recommending Miss Barrington to their friendship as a beloved and adopted child of her own, were received by those who had never forgotten the warmth of Mrs. Barrington's hospitalities or the sweetness of her disposition.

But Maria possessed claims to the goodwill of many, stronger than even these. Little more than twenty years before, her own lovely mother—a Maria Barrington, of less fortunate destinies,—had crossed the threshold of Hexholm Hall, to be united before the altar of Hexholm church with the handsome young soldier whom, in the generosity of her heart, she preferred to the richest of the golden prebenda-

ries of Durham, as well as to more than one estated squire of the county ;—little surmising in how few years after the solemn rite, her happiness was to be annihilated by the premature sacrifice of Colonel Brenton's life at the storming of Bhurtpoor.

Among the elders, therefore, were many who had known and loved her ; among the poor, many whom she had fed and comforted ; and when this second Maria Barrington came among them, looking so like her mother, whom they knew to be an angel in Heaven, and so nearly at the age at which she had disappeared from Hexholm, holy illusions seemed to environ her, and a more tender admiration was created in their minds.

Under these favouring circumstances, no wonder if the warmest of welcomes awaited the heiress. She came to a place where she appeared to have been long known,—long expected. There was a thousand times more sympathy with her *there* than at Easton.

Mr. Fitzhugh, who had celebrated her coming of age in her new home, in the month of March, a week or two after her arrival in the North, could scarcely bring himself to believe, when he visited her at midsummer, that a three months' residence at the place could have sufficed to work such wonders ; not alone in its completion and improvement, but in establishing its youthful mistress in the regard of every one about her. There was something in her youth,—in her helplessness,—in her candour,—and above all, in the name of Maria Barrington,—that recommended her, at once, to every heart.

“ Charming, charming ! This is, indeed charming ! ” cried the gratified guardian, on seating himself in the fine drawing room, which, forming an angle of the mansion, commanded, from the Elizabethan windows of its western aspect, a view of the wooded declivities shelving down to the noble river that leapt, as for joy, among the rocks of the channel it seemed to have cleft for itself through the ochreous earth,—yet opened, on the southern side, into a lofty conservatory, that served to double its breadth as well as infuse into its atmosphere the spicy fragrance of oriental climes. “ If my poor friend could only have enjoyed a glimpse of the paradise he had planned for himself, or, at least, if he could

but have known how worthily his place would be filled up after he was gone, and how religiously all his little whims and fancies respected! Poor Humphrey! He loved to dream of Hexholm; but never did he form a conjecture of the place, my dear Miss Barrington, perfected as it has been by *you*."

Fain would Maria have dispensed with being flattered. She would even have dispensed with being praised. She wanted to hear about London. Mr. Fitzhugh, whose seat in Parliament placed him in collision with all that is eminent in the country, could have told her, had he chosen, so much that she was impatient to hear!

"I could not persuade my good woman to come down with me *this* time," said he, at last, in answer to one of the indirect questions she ventured to ask concerning the pleasures of the season. "She pretended, forsooth, that railroads are disagreeable travelling in hot weather; and talked of heat, and dust, and hurry, and a thousand things she would never have taken it into her head to remember, but for the fear of missing a couple of opera nights, an Almack's, and an Ancient Concert! So it is, my dear Miss Barrington, with even the most reasonable of your sex! The idea of seeing a garden, while the roses are blooming and the strawberries ripe, gives a fair lady the shudders!"

"Mrs. Fitzhugh has written me a much better excuse for not accompanying you," said Maria, smiling, "by promising to come in September, with her children, when the few days you are to give me now will be converted, I hope, into as many weeks."

"Ay, ay! I dare say she has made good her story!" cried the good-humoured husband. "But all the same, if she had chosen to come, we might have perhaps persuaded you to return with us, and take a peep at London, now the season is drawing to an end; that you might judge for yourself of the style in which the young Hopeful on whom you have squandered your property has been pleased to convert his house into a tavern for the 'nobility, gentry, and others!' Had he placed the Barrington Arms over his door, his calling could not have been more manifest!"

"The newspapers, which are so fond of dwelling on such things," replied Maria (aware that her cousin was regarded

with a jealous eye by the trustee, who, in his own despite, had seen so large a portion of her income alienated in Charles's favour), "have duly informed me of the frequency of my cousin and Lady Alicia's entertainments. But surely, sir, there is no objection to this, so long as it is done within the limits of their fortune?"

"Of *your* fortune!"

"*Theirs*,—on that point there can be no question. And I can easily imagine that people who are commencing an establishment in London, must lay the foundation of their circle of acquaintance by a little extra hospitality."

"I would not give much for friendship that requires to be dinner-baited!" rejoined Mr. Fitzhugh.

"I said *acquaintance*, not *friendship*," replied Maria, with a reproachful smile. "But you must have seen my cousin. You must have frequently met him at the House of Commons?"

"Your first word was best, my dear Miss Barrington,—I *am* in the habit of '*seeing*' him occasionally at the House; and he takes care that it shall be as rarely as possible, and at the greatest possible distance. I suspect he feels ashamed of looking me in the face, from knowing how unworthily he fulfils the great and good purposes which your partiality expected at his hands."

"You have no *really* bad tidings to give me of him, I trust?" said Maria, her face crimsoned by sudden alarm.

"By *really* bad tidings, my dear young lady, I dare say you imply such iniquities as robbing a church, or overdraw-ing a banker, or losing thousands at play, or some other act of the modern desperado. No!—Mr. Barrington has done nothing of *that* kind, I fancy. His sins are as decorously committed as those of the burglars, who break into a house in female attire. The unworthiness with which I charge him consists in the puerility of his pursuits and luxuriousness of his habits."

"Poor Charles is even now but four-and-twenty!" pleaded Maria.

"And *you* are three years younger; and why should his head and heart, pray, be less ripe than your own?"

"Because they have been unschooled by the chastening lessons of adversity!" replied Miss Barrington, more gravely than was her wont.

“Ay!—there I’m afraid you have it! Part of this young man’s faults are chargeable upon your own shoulders. If so homely a simile may be pardoned to an old agriculturist like myself, you have heaped rich manure upon soil that wanted rather the ploughshare and the harrow, and your produce has been a crop of weeds! Good grain had never been sown in that piece of waste land.”

“There is time yet!” was Maria’s forbearing rejoinder.

“I doubt it, my dear young lady,—I sadly doubt it. If at four-and-twenty a man’s heart be not open to honourable ambitions—if at four-and-twenty he be not roused by such noble generosity as yours, to prove himself deserving of your esteem, he will never be worth a pinch of snuff! Rich or poor, young Barrington has always been a vain, selfish, superficial numskull! His uncle was at much pains to keep watch over him during his youth and boyhood, and the reports were uniformly unfavourable. There was no integrity of character in him,—no solidity of mind,—no cordiality of heart.”

“When you have quite done abusing him,” said Maria, a little relieved by perceiving that her guardian was by no means an impartial judge of the conduct of one whom he regarded as a locust, devouring the property of another,—“I will give you some luncheon. But till you have promised not to mention my cousin’s name again, do not flatter yourself that you will be allowed to taste the famous Hexholm seedlings, which all the hautbois of all your prize strawberry-growers of the Horticultural never approached.”

And as she expected, the threat prevailed; for Mr. Fitzhugh piqued himself on being one of the first horticulturists of the day.

“I must indeed beg, borrow, or steal some plants of these, for my citizen’s box at Roehampton!” said he, a few minutes afterwards, while the strawberries were still melting in his mouth. “And I am fain to admit, that the espaliers of your rose-garden beat me out of the field. I doubt whether even the far-famed gardens of Damascus ever produced such walls of roses. But of these, you have no right to be proud. These, like Rome, were not built in a day.”

“No,—they were planted by my poor mother; and my

uncle's successors were, I believe, too lazy to destroy them. Do you remember my telling you in London, that one part of the gardens of Hexholm had been so exactly described to me, that I could lead you blindfold to the spot ?”

“Ay! and I remember poor Humphrey telling me as much at Madras,—and those unfortunate girls of his offering to put it to the proof by a bet, on their return to England;—that England, poor souls! which they were fated never to see. And, by the way, my dear young friend, one of my errands here is to submit to you a design for the monument you have commissioned me to erect in Hexholm church. I have, as you requested, conditioned with the artist, that, when complete, it shall not be exposed to exhibition; a difficult point, I must tell you,—the self-love of the sculptor being almost as hard to convince as the humility of a young lady who shall be nameless.”

“Thanks, thanks!” cried Miss Barrington, pressing his hand. “I am afraid I must forgive you all your treasons against one portion of my family, in consideration of the friendly zeal with which you execute for me every little office that might be painful or perplexing to myself.”

“You are the adopted child of the friend of my youth and manhood, and whom I vainly hoped would be the friend of my old age!” replied Mr. Fitzhugh, with moistened eyes, and fervently returning the almost filial pressure of her hand. “I am afraid, my dear, you must have fallen among sorry protectors in this world, to think so much of a little goodwill and a few good offices such as mine.”

“I possess, at least, *one* friend, who, had her means of serving me equalled her will, would never have allowed me to miss the blessing of parental affection!” rejoined Miss Barrington, feelingly. “And as you know my affection for her, and have long learned to respect her through the testimony of my uncle Humphrey, I am sure it will give you pleasure to learn that Mr. Barrington has at length consented to her paying me a visit at Hexholm.”

“Ah! so much the better! I was afraid that, in spite of the strawberry beds and espaliers of roses, you might be apt to feel lonesome here, before the long summer days were over; and I can't afford to let you take up, for want of company, with some Durham esquire, as a partner for life. But

why talk, my dear, as if you had but *one* friend in the world? I can tell you I have been famously cross-questioned in London by folks who call themselves your friends! If your showy cousin don't care to be seen speaking in the House to a squaretoes of my quizzical cut, there are certain county members whom I could name, who are never better pleased than when they can get at me for a bit of chat."

"You allude, I dare say, to Lord Clandon," said Maria, with perfect *sangfroid*,—for she would as soon have thought of blushing at an allusion to Sir Hildebrand Chalkneys or old Dr. Forsyth, as to her faithful friend.

"Who will not be Lord Clandon long, I fancy," rejoined Mr. Fitzhugh; "for my family physician, who attends at Heriford House, announces that the old marquis has not many weeks to live."

"Poor old man! After all, then, he will not enjoy before he dies the gratification he so much coveted of holding a grandchild in his arms! Of all his family, Lady Alicia alone has married in his lifetime."

"I suspect Lady Alicia's offspring is not exactly the grandchild coveted in the family," replied the man of business; "and I foresee no chance of wedlock for my young friend the county member! It ought to sit heavy on your conscience, my dear Miss Barrington, that the poor old marquis goes out of the world disappointed!"

"You have been listening, I see, to the London gossips!" rejoined Maria, endeavouring to smile. "I wonder how, to a grave person like yourself, any one ventured to talk so absurdly. But if Lord Clandon should succeed to his peerage, surely my cousin will be inclined to canvass the county of Bucks?"

"I trust, my dear, you are not going to put such an impertinent pretension into his head?" cried Mr. Fitzhugh, in dismay. "You don't suppose that other people think of this young whipper-snapper as you do? What earthly right has his father's son to represent a county? Who ever heard of Barrington of Easton ten miles from his lodge-gate?—if indeed his gate have a lodge to it!"

"Charles Barrington belongs to an old county family," persisted Miss Barrington. "He enjoys a good income. If not a man of genius, his abilities are respectable, which

I have always understood to be a sufficient qualification for an unambitious member of Parliament."

"Come, come, come, come! I don't desire to see you mounted on Eclipse,—but don't be run away with by a donkey!" cried her guardian, smiling. "We want something a *little* better than that; and a plaguy deal better than Charles Barrington. Equity, discernment, and steadiness, are indispensable qualifications. A pretty successor, truly, would you give to Lord Clandon, who is one of the most assiduous members in the House, as well as one of its most thoughtful and studious politicians! If not an eloquent speaker, he is uniformly listened to with deference. The little he says is always to the purpose,—clearing up some obscure point, or adducing some important precedent. I am assured that government is looking with hope and reliance to Lord Clandon."

"I am sincerely glad to hear it," replied the lady of Hexholm, with so absent an air, that it was clear she was quite content to leave him, whether as earl or marquis, to the loving-kindness of government. A moment afterwards, she was deep in the discussion of garden allotments with Mr. Fitzhugh; who, during the few days he was able to steal from London for his inspectory visit to Hexholm, was obliged to dispose of every minute of his four-and-twenty hours, with the governmental order and personal activity of a Louis Philippe.

Meanwhile, the visit announced by Maria was anticipated by Mrs. Barrington with a degree of interest fully equalling her own. During the first few weeks that succeeded the probate of Humphrey Barrington's will, she had despaired of the happiness of ever beholding her niece again. The rage of her husband at his disinheritance was so unbounded, that it was only by the most careful vigilance she prevented his making his rabid animosity a subject of jest to the whole county.

Not even the unheard-of generosity of Miss Barrington towards her cousin had the smallest effect in softening his resentment. What profited it to *him*?—Charles, who received nothing from his father, had nothing to restore. Even the thousand a year allowed by his son to his wife was but adding insult to injury.

It was in vain Mrs. Barrington assured him that the concession was made nominally through her and her son, only from an apprehension entertained by Maria that, if offered directly and ostensibly to himself, it would be refused. Like a sullen child or encaged beast of prey, he lay growlingly surveying the object which he was too savage to appropriate and enjoy; nor was it till the long series of emotions she had undergone, and the terror in which she lived, had reduced poor Mrs. Barrington to the brink of the grave, that he was suddenly brought to his senses. The allowance would die with her! It was important that she should survive, to secure so large an addition to his income. One of the first tokens of his relenting mood, therefore, was his consenting to accept the five hundred pound note she pressed upon him as the first half-yearly instalment remitted by his son; and promising that, on her convalescence, she should proceed for change of air into Durham, and spend part of the autumn with her niece.

It was not to be expected that he should accompany her to a spot so fraught with mortification to his feelings; and quite as little to be desired. Mrs. Barrington would be doubly welcome to the neighbourhood of Hexholm, by coming alone; and a thousand times as great a source of happiness to her who loved her as a mother.

"I shall have quite enough to do at Easton, while you are gone!" said the amiable man, who professed to devote a large portion of the sum forced into his grasping hands, upon the reparation of the old place. "I shall have the workmen into the house the very day you start; and I leave you to guess what would become of our property here if, under such circumstances, we were *both* to abandon the premises!"

He was, in short, more than satisfied to stay behind and take care that no depredations were committed on his orchard, or turnip fields, or the precious collection of marine stores in his study. Parsimony was the delight as well as habit of his life. The petty routine of extracting the greatest possible amount of produce out of his farm and garden superseded all other considerations; and while Mrs. Barrington was reading aloud some charming letter from Hexholm, or reciting from the newspaper the names of the

distinguished guests of his son, he would often shuffle out of the room,—not in a fit of petulance,—not because angry that they had risen so far above him,—but because “if he did not go and keep an eye on matters, that rascal Watts would neglect to stick the peas and earth the celery; or because it was untold what was wasted daily by the men in cutting the luzerne!”

Pountney Hill, divided between its desire to tell Mr. Barrington what it thought of him, and the dread of offending so near a connexion of one whom the public voice still foretold as the marchioness who was to reign and rule, at some future moment, at Greensells, could scarcely restrain the explosion of its amazement, that a man who was father-in-law to such a high-priestess of Brobdingnag as Lady Alicia Barrington, should have courage to trot over to Tring, in the open face of day, on such a broken-winded pony, in such a hat and jacket, and such an apology for a pair of boots!

“They confessed that, for *their* parts, if they were not so well known in the county, they should be ashamed to be seen stopping on the high road to talk to him.”

It seemed to be his pride and glory, to make evident to the public that, whatever advantages his son might have derived from his uncle’s death, or his own marriage, not so much as a sprinkle of the golden shower had reached his paternal roof.

As, in the last century, the father of the representative of one of our most ancient baronies (through the female line) was pleased to set up a cobbler’s stall opposite to his lordship’s residence, bearing the inscription “Boots and shoes neatly mended by Philip T——, father to Lord A——,” it was the delight of the soured recluse of Easton to have it said at the Quarter Sessions, “*Who* would ever take that shabby-looking man for the father-in-law of Lord Heriford’s daughter!”

But from the moment of his wife’s departure for the north, neither Tring, nor Pountney Hill, nor even the Quarter Sessions, beheld him again. An event so trying to his feelings as being forced to admit into his *sanctum sanctorum* a legion of plunderers in the shape of masons, carpenters, plasterers, and painters, engrossed every second

of his time. His narrow soul was absorbed in hods of mortar and pails of whitewash! The task of placing the old Grange in a state of habitable repair, which he had undertaken solely as a pretext for accepting the thousand a-year proffered by his niece and wife, "to be expended," as he said, "on the property settled on Mrs. Barrington," was one which he commenced in haste, to repent at leisure. Though he was up before the sun, every morning, to take care that not a minute of the labour purchased with his money was wasted—and kept open his Argus eyes after dusk, long after the evening workman had lain down in his lair—he still entertained peevish misgivings that abuses were carried on upon the premises, and plunder carried off.

He wasted as much time in searching after a rusty padlock that was missing from one of the outhouses as might have carried him into Durham!

But this afforded him the solace of saddling his many grievances upon the shoulders of his wife. "All was Mrs. Barrington's fault! Mrs. Barrington had begged of him, at parting (pretending that it was at the instance of Maria), the only thing in the shape of a watch-dog he had got about the premises."

Miss Barrington had forwarded to him, indeed, from London, by way of exchange, a thoroughbred Scotch terrier and a brace of magnificent pointers, which had "made those of Sir Hildebrand Chalkneys sing rather small. But what use were all these put together, as guards, compared with poor Burr; who would not let a tramper come within five fields of the house; and who would have torn half-a-dozen of those rascally workmen in pieces, sooner than let them make away with his master's property by filching the staple and padlock from the wood-house door!"

Little dreamed the poor ragged-coated terrier, in the Elysian fields into which, on his arrival at Hexholm with the traveller, he found himself so strangely translated—even a lambswool rug at the feet of the gentle lady who had so often interposed to save his bones from the knotted holly stick of his savage master—that he had already come to be regretted by his tyrant! But Burr was too happy to recur to the misery and meagre fare of Easton Hoo. By the cheerful voices of Maria and her good aunt, as they sat

together conversing, hand-in-hand, he found that nothing—or next to nothing—was wanting to their perfect contentment.

In Mrs. Barrington's reply to her niece's inquiry, whether she had yet visited Arlington Street, "No, my dear—Charles is too well aware of my inaptitude for the ways of London life, to dream of inviting me,"—there was a slight tone of chagrin. But all was cheerfulness when she added, "Do not let us talk, however, of Arlington Street. You must tell me about yourself, dearest Maria: all you have been doing, and all you are about to do. And when you have told me all this, I want to show you the stockings knit by lame Peggy for the kind friend who has secured the comfort of her old days. But, above all, I want to visit, on your arm, the scenes I so little expected to see again."

It was clear, even to Burr, that no thought of Easton or its tyrant disturbed the serenity of the two, so happy in themselves and each other. But neither the faithful dog nor the good aunt, while accompanying Miss Barrington to visit the more picturesque spots of her beautiful domain, or the healthful and well-ordered village in which the wise administration of Mr. Fitzhugh had already wrought wonders, could surmise the consolation derived by their young proprietress from the mere aspect of so much beauty and happiness. Baffled and thwarted as she had been in early life, and perpetually grated upon by the niggardliness of her taskmaster, it was something to enjoy, unmolested, even the clear light of day and the flowers sending up their fragrance in the sunshine. To her those lovely gardens and that foaming river, were full of companionship. For her, there needed no gossiping of country neighbours to vivify the solitudes of so delightful a spot. Like Tasso,

——— from her very birth,
 Her soul was drunk with love, which did pervade
 And mingle with whate'er she saw on earth ;
 Of objects all inanimate she made
 Idols, and out of wild and lonely flowers,
 And rocks, whereby they grew, a paradise,
 Where she did lay her down, within the shade
 Of waving trees, and dreamed uncounted hours,
 Though she was chid for wandering.

And if all this had been enjoyed among the straitened landscapes of Easton, how much more amid the noble forest and river scenery and the finely-wooded glades of Hexholm Park!



CHAPTER XXXII.

Je fais chaque jour l'expérience qu'il est impossible d'écrire dix lignes sur quelque sujet que ce soit sans compromettre dix intérêts particuliers, sans froisser vingt amours-propres. Les reproches, les plaintes, les réclamations m'arrivent de tous côtés ; et, chose assez ordinaire, les uns se plaignent de ce dont les autres se louent,—car je reçois bien, de loin en loin, quelques lettres de remerciemens.—*JOUY.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the lateness of the season, Heriford House was still open ; and though the family was delayed in town by a cause no less afflicting than the decline of the old marquis, to which his physicians predicted a fatal termination, his sons and daughters continued to enjoy, without much compunction, their share of the pleasures of the closing season. Lord Heriford was a person who fulfilled, with so much dignity and decorum, in all respects, the duties of his station, that he was dying with the same deliberate propriety he had lived,—so quietly and gradually, as to alarm no one's sensibilities and interfere with no one's pursuits. With the exception of his own man, a confidential valet, only a few years younger than himself, who rendered a daily account to the marchioness of the progress of his lordship's symptoms, not a person in the house heeded the slow sinking of the mercury in the tube. As an excuse for taking their daily fees, a few harmless potions were suggested by the physicians. But they promised nothing from the result: aware that remedies are not to be found at the druggist's for the fatal malady called fourscore years.

The marchioness, wise in her generation (after the wisdom of this world), and contemplating life from the corner of her family coach, much as an emmet surveys it from behind a pebble in a gravel walk, was labouring hard to settle her daughters in life previous to their total eclipse under

the shadow of her dowagerhood ; and as Lord Clandon was ever ready and willing, when not engaged in the discharge of his parliamentary duties, to devote the evening to excite the gentle drowsiness insured to his poor old father by hearing the papers read to him,—Lady Heriford was at leisure to discharge the duties of *chaperon*, which *she* appeared to think of equal moment ;—assuring the kind inquirers after her husband, at the *fêtes* she frequented, that “ Lord Heriford was going on favourably,”—which, as he was going straight to his grave, was an announcement somewhat equivocal. But how few of those who inquired were at the pains of even listening to the answer ! People must be sick and die at a *very* dull moment of the London year, to have much chance of exciting sympathy by their exit !

The *beau monde* had other objects of solicitude than the decay of nature of one who, having done nothing in public life and no harm in private, had gone through life untalked of. The county of Buckingham, indeed, took the liberty of wondering a little by whom it should be represented, when Lord Clandon was called to the Upper House. But the county of Buckingham was a bumpkin, whose wonderment was of small account ; and to the world, properly so called, it was of course a matter of indifference whether Heriford Castle and its dependencies belonged to William, seventh Marquis of Heriford, or Richard, the eighth. The world had the daily *déjeûners* of its score of exquisite villas to be scampered after, in barouches and four,—exposing the fairest complexions under the sun to the coolest sun looking down upon the surface of the earth ;—a rash pretence at *al fresco* pleasures on the part of a land which, if it knew what it was about, would never stir from the fireside. People were driving down to be rained upon, among the charming cedars and magnolias of Chiswick ; or defying the dust of the Brentford Road, that their cold chicken might be flavoured with a glimpse of the azaleas and kalmias of Sion ; while innumerable strawberry-parties at Campden Hill, or Gunnersbury, or Cashiobury, rendered dancing a necessary precaution against the chilly atmosphere of an English summer-day, encountered in the suicidal slightness of muslin or jean.

Among those vernal pastimes of fashionable life, a Green-

wich party, made up by the Duchess of Nantwich, was the object of some solicitude: *not* to the chosen set which it included; but to the set a degree lower in the scale of exclusivism, whose parties for the same day were spoiled by the embargo laid upon their stars. Lady Barbara Bernardo, who had as much chance of toleration in the duchess's *clique* as her husband of obtaining the Golden Fleece, was in despair at finding that Lord Henry de Capell, instead of escorting her by the train to a Cashibury frisk, had promised to accompany the Bowbridges to the Crown and Sceptre,—several boxes having been engaged at Astley's for the duchess's party, on their way back to town. Nor was Lady Mortayne less embarrassed, between her desire to join the Greenwich party, which was an object of general envy, —and annoyance at having to appear there, shorn of her habitual cavalier.

For between the duchess's set and Lady Alicia Barrington's, there was as clear a line of demarcation as between that of Lady Alicia and Mrs. Vicary Arable. Among the former, the characteristic of whose finery was the absence of all affectation, Lady Alicia was voted *prétentionnée* and a bore; and the ceremonious civility with which the self-elected Amphytrion of the *corps diplomatique* was treated by Lady Bowbridge and her grace, so convinced her that, beyond an invitation to their annual mobs, their acquaintance was inaccessible, as to have forestalled all attempts, on her part, at nearer intimacy.

Charles Barrington, however, less skilled than his wife in the tactics and impertinence of the great world, entertained an obstinate conviction that, being on visiting terms with the Duke and Duchess of Nantwich, there was no reason he should not be invited to their more privileged *réunions*; and kept throwing himself in their way, for the chance of getting included in the party with which Lady Mortayne was so preoccupied.

On such points, women are clearer-sighted than men; and Eleanor was as well aware as Lady Alicia, that those by whom the party was projected would as soon have thought of extending their invitations to the *jeune premier* of the French theatre, as to the Sir Eglamour whom she found so attractive; and that all the dukes and duchesses of the

peerage might dine at his house, without advancing him a step nearer the distinctions he coveted.

But if vexed at having for once to appear without the shadow, the constancy of whose attendance served, she fancied, to enhance her magnitude, her anxiety became infinitely greater when, some days before the party took place, the ball at Heriford House was followed by the sudden disappearance of Lord Mortayne!

At first his absence appeared a relief. But on the third day after his departure, Lady Mortayne saw fit to address a letter to her husband at Brighton (destined, of course, never to reach his hands), reminding him of the Greenwich party, and expressing a hope that he would be well enough to return to town in time for the engagement.

"To say the truth," added the fair Eleanor, "I do not yet feel on sufficiently intimate terms with your friends, to join them without you; and I trust, therefore, my dear Mortayne, to see you by Friday's early train. If you are prevented coming, write me a line by return of post."

No line arrived by return of post; and no counter-order was consequently issued for the delicate *chapeau en paille de riz garni en clochettes*, and the dress of pale-green silk trimmed with flounces of Brussels lace, which were in preparation to render Lady Mortayne an object of jealousy and *pique* to the duchess and Lady Bowbridge; whose patronage she resented as so insulting, and whose faces, being a dozen years older than her own, she had no great difficulty in eclipsing. She had been careful to mention her engagement to Lady Barbara, Lady Alicia, and others still more eager for admittance into the *élite* set in which she was tolerated; and when the appointed day arrived, bringing no Morty by the early train, and no letter from Morty by the post, his wife was more annoyed than she had felt since the day of discovering that the attentions of Charles Barrington were transferred to Lord Heriford's daughter.

Not that her mind was disquieted by anxiety concerning his health. She was simply angry—not sorry; and when, early in the day, Lady Mary de Capell came bounding into her room, to ascertain whether there was no possibility of inducing the good-natured Lord Bowbridge to get *her* invited, Lady Mortayne hesitated for a moment about throw-

ing cold water on the project. Anything rather than drive down *alone* to Greenwich—bearing her husband's apology, which was no apology at all.

She was too much in awe, however, of the cool, scrutinizing glances of Lord Bowbridge's wife to hazard the attempt, and, having got rid of the importunate girl by assurances that she had herself given up all thoughts of joining the party, would probably have realized her announcement, had not Charles Barrington, when looking in for a minute, at four o'clock, on his way to White's, observed,—“As Mortayne has not made his appearance, *of course* you will not think of joining the party.”

The “of course,” and the emphasis with which it was pronounced, decided her.

“On the contrary,” said she, “as I have no inclination to dine alone, I shall order the carriage.”

All that remained for the disappointed man was to take up his hat. All that remained for the abandoned Ariadne, was to ensconce the *paille de riz, garni en clochettes*; and when, from under the shade of her white parasol, she kissed her hand to the indignant Sir Eglamour, on her way towards Westminster Bridge, as he was making the best of *his* along Parliament Street to the House of Commons, in spite of his wrath at her perseverance in proceeding where she knew he was not to be found, Charles Barrington could not but admit that never had he seen the face of woman half so lovely.

As she approached Greenwich, however, Lady Mortayne felt almost inclined to turn back. Unsupported by “Morty,” she did not feel herself one of the set she was about to join. She had no plea to assign for his absence—she had no plea to assign for her being so cheerful and at ease while he was away. Still, confiding in the power of her beauty, she knew that to one moiety of the party, at least, her presence would be acceptable.

The first person she encountered at Greenwich, lounging near the door of the Crown and Sceptre, with a cigar in his mouth, was Lord Newbury.

“You are hours too late for the match, my dear Lady Mortayne,” cried he, hastening to the carriage-door the moment it stopped, on pretence of assisting her out of it, but so as to prevent the possibility of its being opened by

her servant. "By Jove! how well you're looking! And how tremendously you're got up!"

"Was there a match to-day?" she inquired, careless how deeply her listlessness on the subject might wound the susceptibility of a constituent of that great maritime force, the Thames Yacht Club.

"Yes, a famous one! The *Mystery*, as usual, beat everything to pieces. Would you like to see my boat?—the greatest beauty between this and the Nore!"

"Thank you—I am afraid I am rather late for dinner——" Lady Mortayne was beginning, but beginning only to be interrupted by Lord Newbury's eager protestations that look at it she must and should—that it was lying at only fifty yards' distance in the river. And so vehement were his gesticulations, and so familiar his attitude as he leaned into the barouche looking full into her face, as to afford some ground for the astonishment with which the pair were contemplated by Sir John Hildyard, who was approaching Lovegrove's to join the duchess's party.

On a signal from Lady Mortayne, the steps were instantly let down; and, before Lord Newbury could recover his surprise, she was on the staircase of Lovegrove's, with the view of entering the room as if escorted by Sir John.

As was to be expected from the lateness of her arrival, the party was already assembled. But both the duchess and Lady Bowbridge came forward kindly to meet her. Brilliant with youth and loveliness, she darted into the room like a ray of sunshine; and as they believed her to be accompanied by Morty, who was probably lingering behind to give orders to the coachman, there was no drawback on the welcome she received.

Seated beside the duchess, on the shabby sofa which, during the whitebait season, witnesses on an average twenty severe flirtations per week, she was accepting with a smile the compliments of Lord Alfred on the lightness and freshness of her *clochettes*, while Sir Alan Harkesley undertook the severe duty of toadying the duchess, when Sir John Hildyard, somewhat gravely, approached her.

"I am delighted to see you here, dear Lady Mortayne," said he, "for it puts me at once out of my pain respecting Morty. I was afraid he was seriously indisposed."

"Lord Mortayne is at Brighton," was her reply. "I have just been making apologies for him to the Duchess of Nantwich. I expected him back, till the last moment, or should have written to beg that his place might be disposed of."

"At Brighton?" reiterated Sir John, evidently much astonished.

"He went down for change of air, the day after the ball at Heriford House," resumed Lady Mortayne. "I am sorry to say, Lord Mortayne still retains his oriental partiality for those pernicious vapour baths. But I was in hopes that two or three days would suffice to set him up."

"He was indeed looking amazingly ill at Heriford House," observed Sir Alan Harkesley, who, with the duchess, now joined in the conversation. "At one moment, I vow to heaven, I thought he was going to faint!"

"And no wonder!" drawled Lord Alfred. "*Whose* courage or constitution would bear up against a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Alicia—when showing him her double row of teeth, like an Otaheitan idol!"

"Are you *quite* sure that Morty is at Brighton?" inquired Sir John Hildyard, in a significant whisper, of Lady Mortayne.

"Quite sure. He started on Tuesday by the early train."

"And I, by the evening. On calling in Brook Street that day (so anxious did I feel concerning his indisposition of the preceding night), the servants informed me that his lordship was gone to Brighton, and alone; on which being really alarmed about him, I resolved to follow. But I can promise you that neither on Tuesday, nor the two following days, did he arrive at Brighton! I returned only this morning. No one had seen or heard of him."

"Most extraordinary!" cried Lady Mortayne, while the three other persons who overheard the communication of Sir John preserved an ominous silence. But any one might have noticed that there was far more concern in the air of Morty's old friends than in that of his new wife.

"Morty was always the most eccentric fellow on earth!" observed Lord Bowbridge, by the time the story reached him. "He never could do things like other

people! Don't you remember that day he marched off, as if going to take a walk in the Regent's Park, and never stopped till he got to the Pyramids?"

"You will begin to alarm Lady Mortayne, my dear Bow-bridge, if you talk in that manner;" interrupted Harkesley. "You forget that in the days you speak of he was a Knight of Malta."

"I am not the least uneasy," rejoined Lady Mortayne, who was nevertheless seriously alarmed—not concerning her husband's health, but concerning what Lady Alicia might have been telling him. "There are moments when the atmosphere of London is sufficiently oppressive to make any one of us start off by the first train—no matter whither. Were it in my power, I should like to be in the Highlands this very night!"

"But not without intimating your intentions to the friends you leave behind," argued Sir John Hildyard, apart, to the lady who seemed to take her lord's absence so coolly. "God forbid I should alarm you. But I really wish, my dear Lady Mortayne, you would institute some inquiry, or authorize me to institute some, concerning my friend's destination after leaving home. He was so strangely overpowered when I put him into the carriage at Heriford House, that I could scarcely make him out."

By this time Lady Mortayne was twenty times more *gênée* than she had ever expected to be on joining the party. She fancied them all eyeing her askance, as a monster who had arrayed herself in *clochettes* and Brussels lace, while her husband, in a demented state, was wandering about the country—no one knew where—no one knew why.

"If you will come to me in Brook Street to-morrow," said she, addressing Sir John, in a fit of desperation that gave her courage, and with the sweetest smile she could assume, "I think I shall be able to satisfy you that you have unnecessarily alarmed yourself."

And though the promise was made at random to avert the awkwardness of the moment, it appeared so plausible to all present, that Lady Mortayne obtained the credit of keeping her husband's secret, rather than the contempt of his friends for the heartless levity of her proceedings.

By tacit consent, they abstained from all further allusion to Morty.

The party went off as Greenwich parties are apt to go off; every one agreeing that the whitebait was less good than in preceding years, and the wine and attendance execrable; simply because the individuals present were three hundred and sixty-five days older than the last time they were grilled in the same stuffy room—complaining of the heat of the same setting sun, and the badness of the same quality of champagne. Sir John Hildyard made two or three detestable puns, which were heartily laughed at; and said two or three profoundly witty things, which, like the still champagne, were passed over in silence, as platitudes. Sir Alan Harkesley made a butt of Lord Alfred, and Lord Bowbridge of Sir Alan Harkesley; and by the time a great deal of bad wine had been drunk, and a great deal of nonsense talked, they all got into spirits, and voted that, though the whitebait was less good than usual, it was better than anything else; and that, though the room was hot and uncomfortable, it was pleasanter than the Trafalgar. They were, in short, in a fair way to protest, on their return to town, that the dinner had been successful, and the party delightful.

There was every chance that Lady Barbara and the Baringtons would pass a miserable night.

Unluckily, Lady Mortayne was placed at table between Sir John Hildyard and Lord Henry de Capell; and to secure herself against being cross-examined by the former concerning her husband, afforded sufficient encouragement to the attentions of the latter, to quicken his perception of the fact that his fair cousin was twenty years younger than Lady Bowbridge, as whose *cavaliere servente* it was his allotted duty to officiate. As is frequently the case, the homage paid to Lady Mortayne by Charles Barrington had opened the eyes of others to her attractions; and though Lord Henry had seen through the worldliness of Eleanor Maitland sufficiently to resist his mother's desire that he should make her his wife, he was not the man to shrink from a flirtation, when occasion offered, with a pretty woman, because she was the wife of one friend and the object of attachment to another.

It was not in the nature of his vanity to conjecture that he was encouraged only to cover the awkwardness of a woman *embarrassée de sa contenance*; and his attentions were consequently such as, combined with the forced smiles irradiating the fair face that propitiated them, to justify the air of surprise and chagrin with which Hildyard and Lord Bowbridge, the genuine friends of Morty, contemplated the conduct of his wife.

Lady Mortayne had from the first declined joining the party to Astley's—eager to abridge the embarrassment of her position, and proceed to the opera, to give so favourable an account of the Greenwich dinner as to excite the envy of her friend Lady Barbara, and drive the already sullen Barrington into a still blacker fit of the sulks. But when Sir John Hildyard, on stepping into his brougham, to follow the Duke and Duchess of Nantwich to the circus, saw Lord Henry de Capell quietly assume the place vacant by the side of his fair cousin in her barouche, he was so far from supposing that, just as she was getting in, De Capell had asked her to “give him a lift,” in apparently so off-hand a manner as to render refusal difficult without an affectation of prudery—that he entertained little doubt the *tête-à-tête* was pre-arranged. So also thought Lady Bowbridge on finding herself left with Sir Alan Harkesley, *pour tout cavalier*; and it was scarcely likely that her previous dislike of Morty's wife would be lessened by the desertion of her chosen knight.

By these trifling circumstances, Lady Mortayne, in spite of the becoming *clochettes* and Brussels lace, contrived to render herself obnoxious to the whole party. On setting out from Brook Street, she had reckoned too largely, as a fashionable beauty is apt to do, on the charm of her personal appearance; for it requires the experience of years to understand how small a portion of a woman's attraction resides in the texture of her trimmings, or even in the tincture of her skin.

As little did the lovely Eleanor comprehend that the motive of Lord Henry de Capell, in contriving to return with her alone to London, was anything but to prolong his enjoyment of her society. While *she* attributed his *empressement* solely to the influence of the smiles she had

recklessly lavished upon him, of her charming *toilette*, and the admiration it had commanded, all *he* cared for was that the coachman should drive along Pall Mall and up St. James's Street, on their way to Brook-street, for the chance of being seen from the different club windows!

He was prepared, of course, to apprise every soul he met at the opera, that Lady Mortayne had brought him back to town (her husband being in the country). But he seemed so well aware of the value set upon his word, as to know that it might be as well to have eye-witnesses to the authenticity of the fact.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Sweet hopes she gave to every youth apart,
With well-taught looks, and a deceitful heart.

POPE'S HOMER.

THAT night, on returning from the opera, Lady Mortayne was apprised that my lord had arrived by a late train, and retired to rest in his room on the ground floor. No servant having accompanied him out of town, it was at present out of her power to obtain further insight into the object of his unaccountable journey; and as she was anxious to join a dinner party at Bowbridge House the following day, which she would not have attempted unsupported by Morty, she was rejoiced to hear of his being in town,—especially as he seemed to have divined her wish of establishing terms of unconjugal distance between them.

Nevertheless, when she woke on the morrow with the knowledge she was once more under the same roof with the man whose honour she had endangered, not by deeds, indeed, but words, by encouraging avowals of admiration of a nature to which no married woman has a right to listen,—she felt conscious and ashamed; and, as the moment approached for their interview, had scarcely courage to make her appearance in the drawing-room.

Since they came to town, their hour of rising being different, she had been in the habit of breakfasting in her own

room; the late hours in which she indulged rendering it impossible to continue the domestic system they had enjoyed together at Mortayne. But long before her dressing-hour expired, her husband was usually by her side; and now that he neither came nor sent, she knew that something must be amiss.

Had her affection for him been as it ought, or even had her conscience been clear, she would have been the first to make advances, by hastening down into his dressing-room. As it was, she could only think of the expedient of veiling her uneasiness under an air of haughty reserve. Offended dignity was the safest mask for her fears.

The consequence was that poor Morty, who had looked forward to that interview in anguish of spirit far more painful than her shallow cowardice, was relieved at once. Had he found her full of tender reproaches, or pale and sorrowful, the task he had imposed upon himself had been beyond his strength. But her ill-humour steeled his heart, and almost reconverted him into a man of the world.

“As you doubtless guess, my dear Eleanor, I have been at Mortayne!” said he, with assumed *sangfroid*, when he saw that she did not condescend to question him respecting his movements. “When half-way to Brighton, I reflected that the air of the north was still more bracing than that of the Steyne. But I did not write to announce my change of plan, partly because intending to return on the morrow, and partly lest you should fancy me bent on interfering with the plans you left with Archer, for the new flower-garden.”

Satisfied in a moment that whatever might have been the real cause of his journey, it was not what she had tremblingly suspected, Lady Mortayne replied in a tone of flighty indifference,—affecting to make as light of his absence as he could desire.

“He ought to have written,” she said; “not to herself, indeed,—for his message had prevented her feeling the least uneasy; but to the Duchess of Nantwich, to excuse himself from the Greenwich party, where his absence had occasioned the awkwardness of an empty chair.”

“I admit it,—I ought certainly to have written!”—replied Lord Mortayne, regretting to find her thus placable,—so great would have been the relief to his feelings had she

exhibited a degree of resentment affording a pretext for coldness,—for Morty's kindness of disposition and natural good breeding rendered, indeed, difficult the ungracious part he had to play. "But I thought,—I fancied,—that, during my absence, you would naturally excuse us *both* to the duchess."

"Had I followed my own inclinations," retorted Eleanor, pursuing what she considered her advantage, "I should have done so. But surely it was better, for the sake of appearances,—for the sake of avoiding a discussion of your strange absence,—not to create a double disappointment? Having written to Brighton (where you gave me your address), imploring you to return, I——"

"And *did* you implore me to return?" demanded Lord Mortayne, touched to the soul, and attributing her uneasiness and embarrassment to emotions of a tenderer nature than she cared to exhibit.

"Most earnestly!" rejoined his wife, in a whisper whose softness completed his delusion. And in a moment he flew to her side, unable to withstand the temptation of taking her slight hand within his own. When lo! as he approached her, something in the falseness of the smile under which she was endeavouring to disguise her feelings,—something in the expression of the cold blue eyes she turned upon him (which Henry de Capell had once aptly compared to those of Herodias's daughter), something in her whole air, in short, inspired as she was by the unworthy desire of deceiving him,—so reminded him of—*her mother*,—that, instead of fulfilling his intentions, he staggered back across the room and sank into a chair.

It was the first time he had looked face to face upon Eleanor, since that fatal discovery. He felt,—he felt that it ought to be the last! At that moment, before he had time to recover himself, or give a colouring to his strange conduct, Sir John Hildyard was ushered into the room. *Not* with the expectation of seeing Morty,—whom he still believed to be absent from town; but in pursuance to his engagement of the preceding day with Lady Mortayne, who had promised to afford him an explanation of the proceedings of his friend.

On hearing the announcement of his name, Lord

Mortayne started up, intending to make his escape through the back drawing-room; for he was in no condition to encounter Hildyard's scrutinizing eye. But already, the visitor was in the room.

"The truant is returned, then?" cried Sir John, on catching sight of him. And as he advanced towards Morty with an extended hand, he was about to overwhelm him with playful reproaches for the alarm he had occasioned his friends, when the sight of his haggard countenance and hollow eyes suspended the words on his lips.

"My dear Morty," said he, gently approaching him, "you have been ill! You have been seriously ill!"

"Ill enough!" replied Lord Mortayne, endeavouring to rally his spirits and resume his usual tone, so as to baffle the suspicions his appearance was likely to awaken. "The hot rooms of London, if you remember, were always fatal to me."

"Then why, in Heaven's name, did you risk coming to town this season? Why not remain at Mortayne?"

"Human vanity, my dear Hildyard!" rejoined Morty,—his lips almost refusing to utter the levities so terribly at variance with the feelings he was labouring to repress. "I could not think of shutting up a wife like mine in the country. I wished, of course, to render myself an object of envy to *you* and all the world."

So strange was the discrepancy between this vaunt and the tremulous voice in which it was uttered, that Hildyard was fully justified in believing him to speak ironically. But at that moment, a glance of Morty's eye towards the window, showed him that the wife of his friend, whom, in his dismay at the ghastliness of Lord Mortayne's face he had wholly overlooked, was in the room; and the few minutes that ensued were rendered a little less awkward by the necessary greetings.

"I was afraid you were going to drop my acquaintance altogether, in spite of the satisfaction of seeing my predictions realized!" said Eleanor, extending her hand with a gracious smile, by way of propitiation. "But now that you *do* condescend to speak and listen to me, let me entreat you, Sir John, to unite with me in persuading Lord Mortayne to send for Chambers. You cannot but see how

ill he is looking! Instead of a few quiet days at Brighton, he has been fatiguing himself to death by a hurried journey to the North, to look after his improvements; and, in the present state of the weather, all this has been too much for him."

Thankful to her for taking the explanation, which he found so difficult, into her own hands, and in so plausible a manner, Lord Mortayne overlooked the fact that Sir John had been an eye-witness of the scene at Heriford House.

"At all events, we must take care of him now we have got him back again!" was the kindly rejoinder by which Sir John Hildyard endeavoured to conceal his suspicions, that all was not so smooth between them as both parties wished him to believe.

"Do you dine to-day at Bowbridges'?" continued he. And the manner in which the husband and wife looked at each other, evidently without having come to an understanding on that or any other point connected with their engagements, convinced him that, in spite of appearances, they were still at issue. Sir John was not much surprised by Morty's avowal that it was the first time he had heard of the invitation.

"And what sort of a party had you at Greenwich yesterday?" added his lordship, twirling the tassels of his dressing-gown, as he rested his arms upon his knees, with an assumption of ease, much resembling that of a passenger pretending to converse on the deck of a steam-packet which is beginning to roll.

"Like all other parties of the kind!" replied Hildyard; "more fuss made about it than it was worth. One has to give up pleasant engagements and hurry through the dust to dine ill with those with whom it is much easier and pleasanter to dine well at their house in town."

Understanding by this remark that Sir John considered the party *fiasco*, whereas his observations applied to Greenwich parties in general, Lady Mortayne thought it due to her *bon ton* to express a similar opinion. "She had never been more bored,—she was resolved never to repeat the experiment!" And Hildyard, in whose mind's eye there still lingered the *tableau* of Lady Mortayne's graceful figure and lovely face, reclining in her barouche, with Lord

Newbury leaning in and looking full into her blue eyes under cover of the Mechlin flounce of her parasol,—and of Lady Mortayne in the same position, wrapt in her cachemire as a protection against the night air, with Lord Henry de Capell installed by her side with a cigar in his mouth, starting back to town,—set down the lady who professed herself to have been “bored” as a contemptible hypocrite!

“Do you remember, my dear Hildyard,” said Morty, by way of giving a new turn to the conversation, “that charming Greenwich party we had with the Wessexes, five or six years ago, when the Bertinazzis were in England?”

“Five or six years?” interrupted Sir John. “Nine or ten would, I fear, be nearer the mark! There was poor John L——, and poor George H——, and poor Lady Maryfield, and several others, who, five years ago, alas! had ceased to exist!”

Lady Mortayne looked stedfastly out of the window, lest, by meeting their eyes, her looks should betray that she was dying to inquire whether Old Vassal also belonged to this antediluvian *coterie*.

“A charming party, however, it was!” continued Sir John. “Everybody so well suited to each other, as to produce one of the smooth surfaces indispensable to the brilliancy of society. No mistakes, no discrepancies, no breaking up, as yesterday, before the right moment, because the fractions were not judiciously combined.”

“Lord Henry de Capell and Lord Newbury!” interrupted the sonorous voice of the butler, throwing open the drawing-room door, as if expressly to supply an illustration of the arguments of Sir John. And in sauntered two flagrant specimens of a generation, with which Morty and his friend had as little in common as the age of Addison and Swift with that of the Pickwick school. The very mode of Lord Newbury’s gathering himself into a chair beside Lady Mortayne, as if about to play at leapfrog, afforded a justification for the proposal of Hildyard to the master of the house that he would dress and walk down with him to White’s; so offensive was this forward familiarity in the sight of older men.

“How famously you must have been bored, yesterday!”

said the young lordling, addressing Lady Mortayne, as soon as the door had closed upon her husband. "You only wanted my governor, to have all the bores in London—" he would have added, but for the presence of Sir John Hildyard. But an expressive glance at the back of his coat, as he stood contemplating a beautiful miniature of Lady Mortayne, by Ross, which lay among the trinkets on the table, sufficiently conveyed his meaning. "Henry assures me, however," continued his lordship, "that Lady Bowbridge was in one of her mildest humours, and bit nobody to signify,—except one of the waiters, who was instantly removed to the county hospital."

"I will thank you not to affix my name to your wretched jokes," said Lord Henry, with an air of languid disgust, "as an innkeeper makes people swallow his bad wine, by placing a false label on the bottle."

"Why, you know very well, Henry, you told me at Crock's, last night, after the Opera, that the party was the flattest thing you ever underwent; that listening to the obsolete twaddle of the duchess's set was like looking over a pack of old almanacks; and that the only supportable part of the affair was your moonlight drive home with Lady Mortayne! Now, don't look as if you felt inclined to eat me, old fellow!"

"Do not alarm yourself," interrupted Lord Henry, with an air of ineffable disdain. "I am no cannibal! Anything *raw* is beyond my powers of digestion!"

"Is that the reason, pray, that you were trying to do poor Barrington brown, last night, by persuading him that Lady Mortayne had given up Astley's for the Opera, at *your* entreaty?" persisted Newbury, a little nettled. "It was expressly to get rid of our friend Henry, that Charles Barrington took refuge in Lady Coylsfield's box," continued he, turning towards Lady Mortayne. "Lady Coylsfield being one of the ultra-respectables,—a woman who sits through the opera with as solemn an air as a judge at the Old Bailey or a bishop at a visitation sermon,—Barrington knew himself to be safe under the shadow of her skirts from contact with anything of the name of De Capell"

"Much you seem to know of Barrington's politics!" rejoined Lord Henry, shrugging his shoulders. "Lord

Coylsfield is his cousin,—the only relation, by the way, he is ever heard to mention, like the one great gun dragged out for saluting on state occasions, in some fishing-village. Whenever Barrington wants to cram us, at Heriford House, with the idea that he could get forward in public life, if he chose, he makes up to the Coylsfields, as a pretext for endorsing himself by a connection which, otherwise, would run some risk of escaping people's recollection."

"I can scarcely imagine a man in Mr. Barrington's independent position wishing to make a slave of himself in official life!" said Lady Mortayne, with difficulty subduing her rising ire.

"Not if Mr. Barrington's independence were likely to increase with his family," replied Lord Henry, ironically. "But my worthy brother-in-law seems to be laying the foundations of a dynasty. And by the time there are a dozen little Barringtons crying for cake and wine, any noble cousin on the Treasury bench, whether Coylsfield or not, might prove a useful connection."

"A cousin of Mr. Barrington's in request,—when Lady Alicia is likely, a few years hence, to have half the cabinets in Europe in her pocket?" exclaimed Lady Mortayne, with a smile still more sarcastic. "Surely she would feel indignant at the imputation of requiring the patronage of any Lord Coylsfield in the land."

"Ay, but it does not follow that Barrington sees with the eyes of his wife!" retorted the reckless Lord Newbury, who entertained small respect for either persons or things. "On the contrary, I suspect that when it is east by north with the one, it is west by south with the other. They have lost no time in finding out the grand matrimonial secret of repulsion!"

"The world would be a dull one, if so grand an *arcanum* remained a mystery!" said Lord Henry with affected gravity. "I should look with far more compassion upon the many loving couples exposing themselves to public derision (such, for instance, as my sister Blanche and Algernon Nebwell), unless sure that less than six months of matrimony would fully restore them to their senses."

Sir John Hildyard, who still stood by, in attentive silence, with every reason to conclude from the hollow smiles with

which all this flippancy was propitiated by Lady Mortayne, that her visitors spoke under encouragement, took occasion to demonstrate by his cold manner of taking leave, when apprised by Morty's valet that his lordship was dressed and waiting for him in the hall, his utter disapproval of their modes of speech, and her own habits of life.

"How can you put up with the grave airs of that old blockhead! How can you support the company of such a synod of antediluvians!" exclaimed Lord Henry, the moment poor Morty's friend had quitted the room. "I was in hopes, my dear coz, when you married, that *your* influence would have sufficed to render Mortayne one of *us*. It never occurred to me that he would dream of transporting you back into his own obsolete century."

"Lord Mortayne is, however, some years younger than Lady Bowbridge!" was the significant retort of the angry Eleanor.

"Ten, at least! But when did you ever see me flirt with Lady Bowbridge, except as an act of expiation after doing some foolish thing or other,—such as losing my money at *lansquenet*,—or riding a race,—or presiding at a public charity,—or some abomination equally to be—atoned for?"

Lord Henry, who was prolonging his visit by preconcerted arrangement with Newbury, only till what they believed to be the hour of Charles Barrington's daily visits to Brook Street, began to suspect, from the frequent glances of his fair cousin towards the clock on the chimney-piece, that they had not much longer to wait; when, lo, a very low knock at the street-door caused the colour to rise to the roots of her wavy hair!

Nor was her confusion diminished by the air of uncontrolled ill-humour with which, a moment afterwards, Sir Eglamour entered the room. Attributing to displeasure at finding Lord Henry lolling so familiarly on her ottoman, and Lord Newbury amusing himself by her side with making spills, for which he extracted the materials from her *papeterie* with as much coolness as he might have done at home, the surly manner in which he received their compliments upon his snow-white waistcoat and nether garments (Lord Newbury provokingly inquiring how long he

had been sent home from the *blanchisseuse*), she exerted herself to the utmost to place them on a more agreeable footing. But though the nods and becks and wreathed smiles of Eleanor Maitland were lavished without reserve, they were lavished in vain. Lord Henry and his friend were there for the express purpose of annoying; while Barrington was too seriously annoyed to be placed at his ease by a few playful sallies.

On his way to Brook Street he had encountered Lord Mortayne and Sir John Hildyard;—encountered them, too, at the unlucky moment when Sir John, with the view of probing, for the health's sake of his friend, the secret wound which had produced the singular *esclandre* at Heriford House, was alluding to Lady Alicia Barrington,—a name that recalled so cruelly to Morty's mind the fatal discovery produced by her gossiping, that, on looking up and chancing to encounter the eyes of her husband, it was impossible not to express by the haughtiness of his bow the secret repugnance of his feelings.

Nor was Sir John, who still ascribed to the *liaison* between the fair Eleanor and the man before him, the unconcealed misery of his friend, much more gracious in his salutation. It was a greeting, in short, as nearly approaching as might be, to a direct cut; and Barrington, conscious with what hopes and expectations he was proceeding to Brook Street, had some pretext for surmising that his nefarious designs were discovered; and that the strange flight of Lord Mortayne from town was, in some mysterious manner or other, connected with the discovery.

That, in his anxiety to communicate his suspicions to Lady Mortayne, he should all but insult the two prating boys who were prolonging their visit evidently for the sole purpose of thwarting him, was little to be wondered at; particularly by any one who happened to be aware how black a portion of the temper of the tyrant of Easton Hoo was inherent in the fashionable son, whose assumed courtesies of nature were only too superficial.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

And first I note as a thing most noyous
 And unto youth a grevous maladie,
 Amongis us called love encombrous,
 Vexyng alway yonge peple straungèlye.—CHAUCER.

PEOPLE of the world, especially such as, like Eleanor Lady Mortayne, have not yet entered that memorable twenty-first year which is supposed to mark the attainment of discretion, are little apt to stop short in their career of pleasure, for the purpose of weighing in the balance their own conduct, enjoyments, or prospects.

But so much less than a year had elapsed since the *débutante* of Heriford House was compelled to examine and decide upon the chances of her destiny, that it was difficult not to recur to the deliberation and its results. She could not forbear sometimes asking herself what she had gained by her marriage.

The charming companion foretold by Morty's reputation for agreeability and wit? Certainly not! The puppet purchased under the name of Punch had proved a wooden idol! The distinction in fashionable life which she had expected to derive from the position maintained by Morty in the highest circle of exclusivism? Certainly not! She had been made pungently to feel that a ticket of admission to such a *coterie* is not transferable, even between a husband and wife! The rank of a peeress? Even *that* was in some measure deteriorated by the want of fortune that negatived her attempts to figure brilliantly in the *beau monde*.

As to the charm of domestic intercourse to be anticipated from companionship with a man of Lord Mortayne's intelligent mind, equable temper, and affectionate nature,—the charm which endeared him to so large a circle of friends,—*that* she had never ambitioned,—*that* she had never calculated upon; and disappointment on that point was not of course included among the many causes of her murmurs.

But she was forced to admit that the evil she deplored was of her own creation; that her pique against Charles

Barrington had rendered her too precipitate. Overlooking her own heartless coquetry, it was to *him* she ascribed her reckless choice.

But for his ambitious marriage, she should have abided the chances of another season; and, even if his sudden influx of prosperity had not determined him to offer her his hand, should have formed some other brilliant connection. The admiration excited by that loveliness of person which as Lady Mortayne, artists solicited leave to paint, and poets, without leave or solicitation, hastened to sing, must have secured her adorers among that distinguished class of the youthful aristocracy, ever to be found frequenting such classical haunts as the Tennis Courts, the Red House, and Tattersall's. There was no occasion to throw herself away on a superannuated *roué*. She had been rash,—she had been premature.

Had a well-ordered home, in which to pass a tranquil and meritorious life been the object of her ambition, she might still have created it for herself at Mortayne. But of such a home, she had been sickened at Wolseley Hall. All she desired was a prominent place in the firmament of fashion, calculated to create envy on the part of others, and, consequently, contentment on her own. A round of restless pleasures,—the artificial day of lustres and girandoles,—the soothing of music, blending with whispers of impassioned admiration,—were essential to her enjoyment; the same tendencies which impelled her unprincipled mother to desert her home and children, and outrage all the ties and decencies of life, inspiring the giddy daughter with aspirations scarcely less dangerous.

It was the languor and *ennui* she had betrayed at Mortayne which first produced the discontents of poor Morty. It was the failure of *her* spirits which had caused his own to flag. But for the weariness of supplying excitement and interest to one who could conceive them only amid the gaudy throngs of fashionable life, he would never have languished after the companionship of his former friends, or hurried back to the easy sociability of his club.

Piqued, on her arrival in town, by the want of cordiality exhibited towards her by the Nantwich set, which she chose to attribute to their dissatisfaction at seeing their favourite Bene-

dick united to a wife selected beyond the pale of their exclusivism. She had now confirmed the coldness which the most trifling attempt on her own part would have readily overcome. Her unmeaning flirtation with Barrington seemed to justify their disgust; and their system of tacitly excluding her from their selecter parties, demonstrated their opinion that she could not do better than confine herself to the sphere from which she had been injudiciously extracted, and the predilection for which was *as* injudiciously apparent.

From the day of the dinner-party at Bowbridge House, in short, where the estrangement between herself and Morty became manifest to the whole circle of his friends, they seemed to consider themselves exonerated from all further attempts at conciliation. Bachelor dinner-parties were made up for the express purpose of amusing the general favourite, who appeared so dispirited—to some of which, as a plea for the exclusion of “sweethearts and wives,” was assigned a political character; to others, the plea of sportmanship. The duchess, Lady Bowbridge, and the rest of the leaders of the set, made no opposition, when it was confided to them that these unusual efforts purported only to restore to their friend Mortayne the sunshine of mind overclouded by his ill-advised marriage.

Of the conspirators by whom these pleasant parties and cheerful expeditions were got up, Sir John Hildyard was the only one who acted on system, and with *malice prepense*. The girlishness of Lady Mortayne’s character induced him to hope that she might be one of those who calculate the value of things only on losing them; and that by seeing less of Morty, and learning how many were disposed to dispute with her the enjoyment of his company, she would come to appreciate the blessing of which at present she appeared so careless.

But Sir John, though a brilliant wit, and man of discernment, knew little of the sex. A bachelor, and on conviction, he had not studied woman’s mind in the more intimate relations of life. His theories were derived from books, or from the less worthy specimens of female nature; and in this, as in many other instances, he was mistaken. A disposition like that of Eleanor required, on the contrary, to perfect its reason, the influence of a superior mind exercised with sufficient authority.

Reared in a school of bitterness, the surface of her spirit was corroded by sarcasm. The taunts of her father and brother had created in her mind a mean standard of female excellence. From her childhood habituated to mistrust, and accustomed to hear unworthy motives assigned for the conduct of woman, how was she to suppose that, in other households, an altar was erected to the domestic virtues?—or that chastity, and faith in chastity, constitute two of the most powerful bonds of social life? Prepared to consider those levities of female nature the rule, which are in fact the exception, the mere suspicion that she was mistrusted by her lord and despised by his friends, induced her to throw aside even the feeble panoply she had created to herself, of deference to the opinion of the world.

“Gone to dine at Alan Harkesley’s villa at Hampton Court!” exclaimed Old Vassall, on learning from her, one night at the French play, the cause of Morty’s absence. “Ah! yes, by the way—I recollect! Bardonnaye and Odescalchi told me yesterday they were to be of the party: which accounts, I suppose, for our having to wait so long for the second piece. Mademoiselle Lucille was, of course, *en retard*, for, even by the rail, the distance is alarming. But what can induce a fair bride like yourself, my dear Lady Mortayne, to grant a *congé* for these bachelor parties? Is it à charge de *revanche*?”

Instead of resenting the impertinent suggestion, Lady Mortayne only smiled her contempt; which the old beau accepted as encouragement to launch into one of his chapters of reminiscences.

“I remember,” said he, “when my friend Spilsby first married, Lady Susan used to keep him padlocked and chained like a terrier in a snaffle collar. But before the close of the year, either she got tired of the clanking of the chain, or some one or other (my friend Morty I am afraid) persuaded her that the person who held it was as much a prisoner as the animal it confined; and so, for her own freedom’s sake, Spilsby, poor dog, was set at liberty!”

“If you will take the trouble of inquiring, Mr. Vassall,” was Eleanor’s haughty rejoinder, “you will find that neither chain nor padlock has ever been imposed on Lord Mortayne. The Inquisition is abolished. Slavery is abolished. Why

replace them by martyrdom in married life? Why debar your friend the society of such persons as Sir Alan Harkesley and Mademoiselle Lucille, since it is clearly that which he prefers? Would that every one were so fortunate as to be able to choose their own associates, and avoid the companions they dislike!"

The air of disgust with which this apostrophe was delivered, sufficed (as she expected) to drive the decrepit busy-body out of her box. But Vassall's departure did not console her for the suppressed smile with which her friend Lady Barbara sat biting her lips while listening to his allusions to the bachelor recreations of Lord Mortayne.

To one so vain as Eleanor, the mortification of having her insignificance in her husband's estimation pointed out to the notice of another woman, was more acute, perhaps, than her own discovery of the fact. The pride she had exhibited in her conquest of the all-conquering Morty, rendered it doubly humiliating that the attractions of her youth and beauty had proved insufficient to retain, for six short months, her command over those versatile affections.

Amid the irritations arising from domestic dissensions, or even coolness such as threatened the happiness of the Mortaynes, a confidant is a dangerous thing; the smallest movement or measure suggested by another, being pretty sure to widen the breach. It is worth no one's while to enter so fully into the circumstances and feelings of the parties, even were such an identification with their interests possible, as to enable them to afford useful advice. And on this account it was perhaps fortunate that the pride of Eleanor forbade her exposing her griefs and grievances to such counsellors as Lady Barbara or the Ladies de Capell, or any other of her favourite companions as a *débutante*.

But, unluckily, the danger did not stop here. Even the coldest human heart has need of sympathy. Even the proudest nature is conscious of moments when its pangs are lessened by confiding them to an attentive ear. In time, the frequent absence of Lord Mortayne from his uninviting home became too plain to one who frequented the house so assiduously as Barrington, to be passed over in silence. At first, he was inclined to render a circumstance so propitious to his projects, a matter of *persiflage*. But the feelings of

Morty's wife were too extensively embittered to submit to derision. She required soothing,—she required pity; and pity and soothing were lavished upon her with such considerate tenderness, that the whole budget of her grievances was laid open to excite all the indignation she desired, as well as a secret joy that did not enter into her calculations.

By degrees, her vexations began to appear almost dear to her; so careful was she to store up every particle of her injuries in the treasury of her heart, to be exhibited at leisure to the sympathizing friend who made his daily appearance in Brook Street, to listen and to deplore. Had he failed her, how dreary would have been the remainder of her day! Had he failed her, the tears which his kindly counsels enabled her to repress, would have burst forth! Nature was wreaking her revenge. The girl who, at the age when love is becoming, had sacrificed the promptings of her heart to the base scheming of ambition, was at length overmastered by feelings, subdued for a time only, that, like an impeded current, they might assume redoubled force. "*Chassez le naturel,*" says the adage, "*il revient au galop.*" The imprudent wife was atoning a thousand-fold for the hardheartedness of the *débutante*!

The season had, by this time, progressed into a slow and feeble repetition of its more vivacious strains, resembling the expiring tune of a musical box, which no one is at the pains to stop,—satisfied that it will soon wear itself out. People were growing tired of looking at each other, and tired of listening to each other; unless such well-assorted couples as felt that they could look and listen for ever. Among these, unhappily, were several to whom looking and listening were unlawful; but who were not the less content to prolong the diversions affording a mantle to their infatuation.

Even Heriford House at last closed its window shutters. The marchioness, perceiving that neither crowded balls, nor select *déjeuners*, availed to open the eyes of Lady Mary and Lady Blanche to the folly of their flirtation with two portionless younger brothers, obtained a decree from the family physician that her lord might perhaps derive benefit, and could sustain no possible harm, from removing to Greensells; where, thanks to the railroad, medical advice was procurable

in an hour from town; and as Lord Clandon was likely to be detained ten days longer by his parliamentary duties, his brother Henry condescended to become his substitute with the invalid.

By these changes, the only house in which she was familiar, ceased to be accessible to the imprudent Eleanor; while, by the loss of Henry de Capell, whose services as an escort were usually at her command, she was left entirely in the hands of his brother-in-law. And right eagerly did Charles Barington pursue his advantage! Whether riding, walking, or driving, they were continually seen together.

“As the husband of her cousin Lady Alicia, Lady Mortayne naturally sees more of him than of others,” observed Morty, with apparent unconcern, in reply to an observation hazarded by Sir John Hildyard, purporting to modify an intimacy which might become injurious to the honour of his friend. “Now Lord Henry has left town, she has no one else to give her an arm when I am not at hand. Clandon, this year, has not so much as shown his face in the world.”

Too well aware of the proverbial danger of interposing a finger *entre l'arbre et l'écorce*, to persevere where the husband himself seemed disposed to discourage enlightenment, Sir John adverted no further to the delicate subject. He almost repented his forbearance, however, when, at the instigation of one of those sudden glows of summer weather which even an English July occasionally calls out of the furnace, the Nantwiches set sail for the coast of Brittany;—carrying with them Morty, whose increasing languor not only caused serious uneasiness to his friends, but who, even by his physician, was ordered change of air.

“Try a cruise, Morty—try a cruise!—Yachting always agreed with you!” had long been the chorus-cry of White’s; and on his stating that “Lady Mortayne disliked sailing,”—instead of finding the plea accepted as contrary to the advice given, his friends unanimously seconded the opinion of the Duke of Nantwich, that, “in THAT case, there could be no objection to Morty’s embarking with him and the duchess, in their expedition to Cherbourg.”

The person *most* eager, however, in seconding the scheme, was Eleanor. “He was looking very ill. London seemed the worst place in the world for him; and yet, during the

touring season, she should be sorry to encounter the annoyance he had so often described to her from the incursions of the Vandals visiting the lakes. If he would consent to accompany his friends the Nantwiches in their comfortable yacht, she would spend the interim at Wolseley Hall."

Relieved by this arrangement from all further scruples, Lord Mortayne ceded to the entreaties of the duke; and before the feverish heat of the weather which had improvised the scheme, subsided, the Southampton train conveyed them to their trim little "Amphion."

"I would not alarm you so long as we were within sight of shore, my dear Morty," said the duke as they stood out for the coast of France; "but I mean our cruise to be of three weeks or a month's duration. *We* shall be much better off than pottering at Cowes; and I have medical authority for the conviction, that a complete change of air, scene, and society is indispensable to the restoration of your health."

But however sincere Lady Mortayne might have been at the moment, in her announcement of an intention to visit Wolseley Hall (as she would have undertaken any other disagreeable duty to secure Lord Mortayne's departure from town, and her own relief from the mortification of witnessing the significant smiles of Lady Barbara, and the expression of Vassall's astonishment, at seeing her excluded, day after day, from the inner circle of exclusivism into which she boasted of admittance), no sooner was he fairly off,—no sooner was the sailing of the "Amphion" announced among the ship news,—than she discovered the absolute necessity of remaining a short time longer in town.

"Her brother was the sort of person on whom it was impossible for even his nearest relations to intrude, uninvited. Besides, she had promised her old friend, Lady Essendon, to be at her ball, which would be the last of the season; Lady Essendon, whose eldest daughter was to be presented at the first drawing-room of the ensuing year, being desirous to lay the foundations of a dancing acquaintance for her benefit, previous to the important event."

With Charles Barrington constantly at her elbow, to add "Of course! You could do no otherwise,—Lord Mortayne can have no possible objection to your following your dis-

cretion on such a point,"—she was not likely to feel irrevocably condemned to the *convée* of Wolseley Hall.

The beautiful barb was still, therefore, in constant request; and the name of Lady Mortayne cited, twice a-week, by the newspapers, in the list of fashionables present at the opera. Nay, she was tempted to join more than one Greenwich party, the ease and gaiety of which fully compensated for the dulness of her first experiment.

"What a world it is, and what a system of things we are coming to!" said Sir Alan Harkesley, confidentially to Lord Alfred, while waiting for a tumbler of Hock and iced Seltzer-water, one night at White's, after escaping from a ball-room, where people were dancing as furiously as though that morning the thermometer had not stood at eighty-eight degrees in the shade.

"So long as I can remember, fools were to be found who would dance in the dogdays!" was his lordship's philosophic reply, filling himself a glass of the Seltzer-water without the appendix.

"Let them dance, and welcome! But you can't say you remember many instances in which people, only six months married, went on at the rate of the *beau* Barrington and Morty's wife. By Jove, I never saw such a barefaced flirtation! I am not a ball-man; but I am told it is only ditto repeated of last year. And what was there *then* to prevent their marrying? Barrington has more than twice the income of poor Morty; Lady Mortayne four times the fortune of Lady Alicia. Is it possible that the mere vulgar love of title could influence them to make themselves and two other persons wretched and discreditable for life?"

"Hardly, I should think!" rejoined his companion, calmly setting down his glass. "They probably did not like each other well enough to marry. But there is a wondrous charm in poaching. Another man's preserves always seem to afford better shooting than one's own manor."

Fortunately, perhaps, for those whose honour was most concerned, this modern moral sentiment was overheard by Lord Esher; who, chancing to meet Sir Wolseley Maitland at a dog-fancier's out of whose kennel he was providing himself for the shooting season, inquired with so much significance whether his friend had seen Lady Mortayne

since he came to town, that it was impossible even for the most careless of brothers not to inquire further.

"I called yesterday," said he, "within an hour or two of my arrival; but Nelly was out. I expected to hear from her this morning. I dare say I shall find a note from her or Mortayne on my return to my hotel."

"*From Mortayne*, my dear fellow? Why, he is gone sailing to the Mediterranean!" cried the astonished Lord Esher.

"The Brook Street servants said nothing of it yesterday," observed Wolseley, almost equally surprised.

"They might not think it necessary to mention a fact which the newspapers have published to all the world."

"How was I to know anything about it? I never read what is called the fashionable intelligence. But how long has he been gone, pray; and *why*,—and with *whom*?"

"With Nantwich, one of his oldest friends, who sailed ten days ago. The *why*, I am afraid, must remain matter of conjecture."

"And what do you *conjecture*, then, on the subject?"

"That the weather in Brook Street has proved too squally, of late, for a man so fond of a quiet life as Mortayne!"

"Do you mean, my dear Esher, that he and Nelly *disagree*?" inquired Sir Wolseley, more earnestly.

"It is the only deduction one can draw from the facts of the case."

"I always foresaw and predicted that no good would come of her marrying a fellow of such dissolute habits as Mortayne!" cried Maitland, beginning to fire up. "But Nelly would not listen,—Nelly would not be warned!"

"No, hang it,—one can't say that Mortayne is wholly to blame in the present instance!" retorted Lord Esher.

"Not when he goes roaming about with his old friends, leaving his young wife alone in London?"

"Are you quite sure that his young wife was not the means of driving him away?" persisted Esher.

"For God Almighty's sake, speak out," cried Maitland, losing all patience. "You will drive me distracted by all these hints and implications."

"Nay, there is no immediate cause that I know of for distraction," was the cool rejoinder of the interfering friend,

"Only it is certainly as well you should know that people think poor Morty is made less of at home than he has been accustomed to elsewhere; and that Charley Barrington is seen much too often in his place."

"'People,'—'people!'—why not say *who*, at once!" cried Maitland, excited by this time into a fury of rage. "If any one has anything to advance against my sister's conduct, why not put his name to his opinion, and address it to some person entitled, like myself, to take notice of the scandal!"

"Because, my dear fellow, nobody is particularly anxious to get shot for what is not his affair; as would infallibly be the case, in your present mood and temper! But I tell you, Maitland, because I feel it the bounden duty of a friend to run some risk, both *for* you and *from* you, that the coolness between the Mortaynes is notorious in London; and that the sooner you create a coolness between your sister and Charley Barrington, the better."

"I always considered Barrington a sneaking, pitiful puppy!" was Sir Wolseley's not very apposite rejoinder. "I should have called him to account for the outrageous manner in which he flirted with my sister without offering her his hand, when she was going about with Lady Heriford last season, but from knowing that my consent to the match would be wanting, even if Nelly accepted him! There was always something temporizing and underhand in his conduct that seemed to call for explanation."

"There is nothing, at all events, underhand in it *now*!" observed Lord Esher, who, never favourably disposed towards the sister of his sporting chum, seemed little inclined to become a peace-maker. "Nothing more bare-faced than the way in which his attentions are offered, except, indeed, the way in which they are received!"

"I will go to Brook Street this very moment!" cried Sir Wolseley, beckoning a cab from the stand at Hyde Park corner, which they were leisurely approaching.

"Softly, softly, my dear fellow! Detection is a better thing than accusation," quietly interposed Lord Esher. "By finding the delinquent on the spot, you place yourself at once in the right, in any altercation you may have with Lady Mortayne."

"And when am I likely to find him on the spot?"

“Certainly not at *this* hour, when he is enjoying his first sleep, after the black-hole-of-Calcutta atmosphere of Lady Essendon’s ball! But I will not afford you better information, my dear Maitland, unless you give me your word of honour that you will not do so stupid a thing as get into a quarrel with Charley Barrington?”

“*That* I readily promise; for it would afford him too great an advantage over me, as well as confirm whatever misunderstanding may exist between Nelly and her husband. No, no! it is my sister I shall attack. Having once satisfied myself that your surmise is just of undue intimacy between her and Barrington, I shall exercise all the influence and authority in my power, without violence or even unkindness, to bring her to a better way of feeling. In these cases, as the first step to folly is always taken by the woman, it is but fair to give her a chance of the first step towards repentance!”

“If such be your intentions,” rejoined Lord Esher, “call in Brook Street to-day, about three o’clock. You will find Barrington’s cab waiting in Park Lane; and its master——”

“Enough,—enough!” interrupted Sir Wolseley, not choosing to hear, even from the lips of his friend, disparaging allusions to his sister. “My duty lies plain before me.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

Praise her but for this, her without-door form,
 (Which, on my faith, deserves high speech), and straight
 The shrug, the hum, or ha; those petty brands
 That calumny doth use:—O I am out,
 That mercy does:—for calumny will sear
 Virtue itself.—SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN, at the hour agreed upon, Sir Wolseley Maitland turned the head of his hack from Grosvenor Square into Brook Street, he descried, driving from his sister’s door a cab, which he had little difficulty in recognizing as that of Barrington. Another moment, and it passed him. Another moment, and their eyes had met. And though an exchange of bows ensued, as between ordinary acquaintances, an ejaculation of thankfulness escaped the lips of Maitland,

that their encounter had not chanced in the drawing-room of Lady Mortayne;—conscious that, had the face of Barington assumed *there* the same impertinent smile of triumph it was wearing as he dashed along the street, it might have been beyond his own command of temper to refrain from knocking him down.

The consequence of this incident was that, instead of entering the house in Brook Street with the composure he had premeditated, every nerve in his frame was thrilling, and every vein inflated with suppressed ire. Charles Barington's daily visit had probably occurred earlier than usual. Expecting her brother, Lady Mortayne had so accurately calculated his time for going out, as to avoid the chance of a collision; for on knocking at the door, Sir Wolseley was admitted without so much as a question asked.

Had he been aware of the portentous paleness with which anger had overspread his face, he might have hesitated to present himself in his sister's presence. But his whole thoughts were absorbed in the man he had just seen,—so smiling, and so vain-glorious; and on reaching the drawing-room, the blinds of which were drawn down to create the *demijour* essential to the aspect of beauty at that glowing season of the year, and finding his young and lovely sister arrayed in all the costly elegance of her station, and the coquetry which, at that moment, was loathsome in his sight, Sir Wolseley held the hand she extended towards him grasped for more than a minute within his own, while silently measuring her from head to foot, with a scrutinizing and scornful survey that made her shrink into herself.

When at length he released it from his grasp, it was with an abruptness of gesture that caused her almost to fall back upon the sofa from which she had risen to welcome him. As yet, not a word had escaped his lips. But the whiteness of his features and fixedness of his gaze spoke a thousand accusations.

"I am afraid you are ill, my dear Wolseley?" faltered his sister, alarmed by indications of emotions so unusual.

"Not *ill*!"

"The bringer of bad tidings, then?" persisted Lady

Mortayne, struck with sudden apprehension that he might be the bearer of some horrible intelligence relating to her husband.

"I know not what *you* are likely to call bad tidings!" rejoined her brother, his countenance assuming a sarcastic expression, which at once relieved her fears. "*Whom* do you care for sufficiently in this world, Nelly, to tremble at the thought of evil having overtaken them? Neither husband, I fear, nor brother, nor friend! The only object of your solicitude that *I* am acquainted with, has too recently left your presence to admit of feeling uneasiness on *his* account!"

"*You* are the first person with whom I have spoken to-day," replied Lady Mortayne, resuming her composure, and thanking her stars for the prudence which had determined her to decline Charles Barrington's visit that day, by a note delivered to him at the door,—acquainting him that she was expecting her brother, and could not see him till that night at the Opera.

"Do you mean to say that Barrington has not this moment left you?" cried Sir Wolseley,—indignant at what appeared the most audacious hypocrisy.

"I mean to repeat what I said before, that I have received no visitor of any sort or kind. As soon as I was up this morning, I desired to be denied to every one, that I might not be interrupted in case of a visit from yourself."

Sir Wolseley, who could have almost sworn to seeing Charles Barrington emerge from his sister's house, and who entertained but little faith in woman's word, from a duchess to a chambermaid, was rash enough to resolve on putting his suspicions to the proof, by ringing the bell.

During the pause that ensued, Lady Mortayne sat silent and shame-faced. For, mistrusting her brother's purpose of interrogation, she was by no means sure that his inquiries might not elicit the fact that Barrington's visits were of such daily occurrence, as, even that morning, to require her to excuse herself, by a note, from receiving him.

But Sir Wolseley was too deeply moved to be circumstantial. When the bell was answered by the butler, he simply inquired,—so as not to commit Lady Mortayne in

presence of her servants, in case she had told the truth,—
“Pray, did I not meet Mr. Charles Barrington driving from
the door just now?”

“Yes, Sir Wolseley.”

“Did he leave no message?” interposed Lady Mortayne,
in order to forestal further cross-examination.

“Only his compliments, my lady.”

“Should any *other* person call,” added her ladyship, re-
suming her tone of authority, “you will follow the orders I
sent down this morning by Mrs. Page, and say that I am
not at home.”

The servant had scarcely withdrawn, when Sir Wolseley
hurried towards his sister with an extended hand, which she
was wise enough to accept as frankly as it was offered.

“I beg your pardon, Nelly,” said he, “I sincerely beg
your pardon! This is an ill-natured world; and Mortayne’s
unaccountable absence has given rise to rumours and con-
clusions, which involve your reputation more extensively
than you suppose.”

“So long as those rumours do not injure me with my
friends, I care very little about the matter,” replied his
sister proudly. “As to Lord Mortayne’s absence, surely
there is nothing *very* mysterious in his having accompanied
his old friends, the Nantwiches, yachting, for change of air,
because (as no one knows better than yourself) his wife is
too bad a sailor to join the party?”

“A married couple in their first year of matrimony,
usually contrive to change the air and enjoy their diversions
together,” retorted her brother. “And so would you and
your husband, Nelly, had you not made so unsuitable a
match. I warned you—you cannot have forgotten it—
against marrying a man whose connections, pursuits, and
tastes were too thoroughly established to admit of becoming
secondary to your own.”

“You warned me, but it does not follow that I have suf-
fered from the verification of your prophecy,” rejoined Lady
Mortayne. “My husband has opposed no wish or inclina-
tion of mine. The moment he saw me desirous to spend the
season in town, this house was engaged for me. I see whom
I like—I go where I like—I decline all invitations that are
disagreeable to me——”

“Perhaps so—perhaps so! I don’t say that you have not your own way. But had you married a man of your own age,—a man to whom the world was as new as to yourself,—there would have been such unanimity of occupations between you as would have prevented the possibility of undue intimacy with a forward jackanapes, like Charles Barrington; and, consequently, the false importance ascribed to it, at this moment, by the world.”

“Say rather, my dear Wolseley, ascribed to it by a few idle gossips belonging to a few idle clubs,—for the world knows better!”

“The world can only form its conclusions from what it sees. As Miss Maitland, Charles Barrington was your avowed admirer,—as Lady Mortayne, the same familiarity continues. Are not people justified in attributing the same cause to the same effect?”

“Certainly not! Mr. Barrington and myself have, in the interim, accepted partners for life. His wife was as much the object of his free choice, as Lord Mortayne of my own.”

“So was my father the choice of our most unfortunate mother!” cried Sir Wolseley, with some acrimony, “which did not prevent her dishonouring *him*, and disgracing and deserting her children!”

“The allusion, brother, is scarcely gracious—scarcely *fair!*” Lady Mortayne was beginning. “But——”

“It *is* fair—it is fair—it is even necessary!” interrupted Sir Wolseley. “Such a family as ours, Nelly, is regarded by the world with a jaundiced eye. In the blood of the children of a licentious mother vice is supposed to be inherent. Do you think I have never smarted under the shame of hearing opprobrious epithets applied to women who have outraged the decencies of their sex? Do you imagine that no mental voice whispered to me, all the while, ‘such, even such, is the mother whom, by the laws of God, you are bound to honour?’ I swear to you, sister, there have been moments when my life was not worth a rush to me, after hearing my father indulge, as he used, in those coarse allusions to his miserable wife, which kept ever cankering in my mind the memory of *whom* and *what* I was the son.”

"All this is painfully, *too* painfully true!" replied Lady Mortayne, in the soothing tone his excitement seemed to require. "But I see no reason why it should influence your opinion of my conduct."

"It does *not* influence my opinion of your conduct! It merely satisfies me that your conduct *ought to be* twice as circumspect as that of any other woman, to defy the unjust conclusions of society. When I call to mind the misery of my childhood,—the sneers of the servants,—the airs of compassionate superiority of the tenants' wives, the perpetual irritation of my father (which *your* tenderer years prevented from falling so harshly upon yourself),—I swear I would sooner see a woman in whom I was interested lying dead in her coffin, than incurring herself, and entailing upon others, the imprecations earned by a wife untrue to her marriage-bed!"

Impossible to listen, without emotion, to adjurations so solemnly and earnestly made. Even the frivolous Eleanor heard and trembled.

At that moment, indeed, she felt grateful to GOD, that she still retained the right of looking her agitated brother honestly in the face. She had been imprudent, but not guilty. It was not even yet too late to secure herself, and those to whom her honour was dear, from the heavy retribution glanced at so feelingly by Sir Wolseley.

The first evidence of her penitence consisted in an unpremeditated avowal that she *ought*, at that very moment, to have been at Wolseley Hall.

"To own the truth," said she, "I was afraid of encroaching on your engagements, by letting you know that, at Mortayne's departure, I had promised him to pass with *you* the interim of his absence."

"To come down to me at the hall? By Jove, that accounts for what puzzled me so the other day, when my steward wrote word that there were several foreign letters addressed to you, lying at Wolseley, which I instantly ordered him to forward hither. But it was hardly fair of you, Nelly, either towards me or your husband, not to realize what you had promised. Better late, however, than never! There appears little probability of Mortayne's immediate return. Leave town, therefore, with me this even-

ing—to-morrow morning—when you will! My carriage shall be at the door to take you to the rail, and save you all possible trouble, at any hour of any day you will choose to appoint. I will either accompany or meet you at Wolseley, as you like best.”

Unwilling to own how little she saw that was palatable in either arrangement, his sister contented herself with ceremoniously expressing her sense of his kindness.

“On Monday, however, at the furthest, I must be there!” added he, without much heed to her idle compliments; “for, as you may perhaps remember, I am steward of the Hartstonge Races this year, which fall on the second of August.”

“Yes, Lady Essendon, and one or two other persons told me they were going down for them,” replied Eleanor. And it afforded some slight hope of modification to the habitual dulness of Wolseley Hall, to know that races were forthcoming in the neighbourhood, as a pretext for bringing people together.

As long as she could remember, Eleanor had heard wonders from their country neighbours of this county solemnity; and having been away from home, as a guest at Greensells, the preceding year, when, as a *débutante*, she was entitled to become an ornament of the gay assemblage, her curiosity and interest were excited by the prospect afforded.

“I have, unluckily, invited Esher and a few other friends,” said her brother. “Had I entertained the slightest hope, Nelly, of having *you* for my guest, I would, of course, have asked no one without previously consulting you. But I need not tell you that, while officiating as mistress of the house, you will be your own; and see as much or as little of my guests as you think proper.”

Though sadly afraid that Sir Wolseley’s visitors might be of an order to render the latter alternative peculiarly acceptable, Lady Mortayne was not sorry to seize upon so plausible a pretext for her precipitate departure from London. To preside over her brother’s party at county races of which he was the steward, sounded almost like the discharge of a duty; nor could Lady Barbara pretend to fancy she was obeying some peremptory matrimonial mani-

festo, forwarded from Cherbourg; or Charles Barrington suppose that she had taken flight from town, in mistrust of herself.

“You mean, I hope, to prove to the natives that, however fine a lady you may have become, you have not altogether forgotten that you write yourself *née* Maitland!” said Sir Wolseley, more cheerfully, after receiving her promise to meet him at the hall on the 31st of July. “I trust you will go through the whole *corvée*, my dear Nelly—ball included? Lord Essendon and I, as stewards, shall be right proud of the countenance of a London *belle* like the fashionable Lady Mortayne!”

On this hint, amidst all her flurry of spirits and struggles of conscience, the vain and giddy Eleanor found time to issue orders that purported to render her irresistible. New dresses were hastily ordered, and the family diamonds presented to her by her brother, instead of being deposited with the banker, became the companions of her journey.

With the petty ambition of a narrow mind, she had always projected to return at some future moment as a guest to the house of her fathers, and overwhelm the country neighbours to whom, even as a girl, she had felt herself so superior, with her consequence as a peeress. But, above all, by her consequence as the worshipped wife of the popular and fashionable Morty; a position which, at the moment of her marriage, she valued far more than the mere precedence of rank; and, had her mind been of a reflective nature, it might have afforded food for painful meditation that, after so short a period of wedlock, she was approaching Wolseley Hall, shorn of the importance to be derived from her husband's presence and support.

But it did not seem to occur to her that the wives of the neighbouring baronets and squires would be less easily satisfied than the magnates of Grosvenor Square, with such a pretext for Lord Mortayne's absence as, that “he was yachting off the French coast with his friend the Duke of Nantwich;” or that one or two of the kindlier-hearted, who remembered her from a child, and had grieved over her deserted infancy, would whisper to each other, with tears in their eyes,—“Poor thing—poor *young* thing!—to be so

soon neglected! Pray God that, thus left to herself, she may not be inveigled into the same evil courses as her mother!"

If, indeed, she noticed that they were occupied in discussing her, it was to surmise that their attention was attracted by the splendours of her bridal lace and the grace of her deportment; fancying her hardened self-possession a wonderful improvement on the blushing inexperience of the damsel of the chintz terrace-room.

On being placed once more in possession of the said terrace-room, by the way, she was a little moved by the feeling manner in which her brother observed,—“You will find that nothing has been touched here, Nelly, since you quitted it. I had several large parties staying with me last winter; but, not choosing that a finger should be laid on anything that had been yours, this room, and your old bed-room and dressing-room, were locked up all the time; in order that, if ever you thought proper to come and take possession of them again, all might be still to your liking.”

Howbeit, at that moment coldly revolving in her mind on what pretext to make her appearance in her own carriage at the races, instead of as a hanger-on upon her brother, she was forced to offer thanks, that sounded affectionate, for his thoughtfulness. Impossible not to admit that, on some points, in spite of his abruptness, Sir Wolseley was considerate and kind; nor was it for *her* to philosophize on the fact that he would probably have been uniformly kind and considerate, had not the better qualities of his nature been nipped and blighted for want of the fosterage of parental love; or that his principles had been undermined by the perpetual scorn and bitterness heaped by his father on a sex which, after the Supreme Being, a good man is bound to hold sacred.

When the race party came to assemble, however, unblinded by sisterly partiality, Lady Mortayne recognized with regret in her brother's selection of acquaintance, grievous proofs of the bad taste to result from an unfair estimation of womankind. As in the exhausted receiver of an air-pump a guinea and a feather have equal weight, the judgment of Sir Wolseley admitted no difference between woman and woman, save that between beauty and ugliness,

or the good or ill humour rendering even beauty of secondary account. Provided a girl were pretty or a woman agreeable, he took little heed of those minor distinctions of conduct or caste, which occasionally condemn to ostracism women both handsome, clever, and entitled to a good position in the world. The consequence was, that the parties of which he had spoken to his sister, consisted chiefly of persons who for some discreditable reason or other found it worth while to toady him; jewels, far from flawless, in the shape of damsels who pretended, at any cost, to be Lady Maitland, after vainly endeavouring, season after season, to become Lady Anything-else; or flirting married women, whose names had been coupled with those of a series of admirers, having thousands a year and Wolseley Halls at their disposition.

Lady Essendon, who like most of Lady Mortayne's former acquaintance, had found herself all but overlooked by her in town, as of too humdrum a showing for one ambitious to shine in the Bowbridge and Nantwich set, was not a little astonished by the *empressement* suddenly evinced in the race-stand at Hartstonge by her ladyship, to assume a place by her side: the motherly countess being wholly unqualified to understand with what disgust the fastidious Eleanor found herself presiding over a party including such flagrant luminaries of second-rate fashion, as Lady Caroline Dormer, Mrs. Stratton Stretton, and the pretty, witty, pity-that-she's-so-talked-about beauty of a dozen seasons—Flora Dyrham. The invisible fence irreverently dividing such people from the brilliant throng with which, to Lady Essendon's unpractised eye, they appeared to be closely amalgamated (because occasionally admitted on toleration into the mobs of the *beau monde*, and seen night after night at public places of fashionable resort), was as plain as an iron grating to one so lately schooled as Eleanor in the perspicacities of exclusivism. Though too indifferent to the happiness of her brother to entertain the anxiety that might have been only natural, lest the brilliant Flora should entrap him into matrimony—or Mrs. Stratton Stretton endanger his peace of mind by her unprincipled coquetries—she was keenly alive to the disadvantages that must accrue to herself should women of

such questionable reputation fasten themselves upon her as intimates. She did not resent her brother's allusions to her own levities of conduct;—she was prepared to forgive him that and everything else—except his callousness to her fair fame in exposing her to contact with persons of such decidedly *mauvais ton*!

Had her pretensions to the curule chair of exclusivism been supported by the presence of her husband, the reputation of Morty both as a wit and an *élégant* might have enabled her to stand her ground, both against the aborigines, and Sir Wolseley's equivocal visitors. But as there was every appearance that the brilliant man of the world was leaving her to amuse herself as best she might amongst her connections, while *he* diverted himself among more refined associates—the guests at Wolseley, of whom she was at such little pains to disguise her disdain, affected in their turn to regard her in the light of Miss Maitland, rather than as the star of a higher sphere to which it behoved them to be thankful for deigning to shine upon their rusticity.

Lord Esher, and certain other of Sir Wolseley's wild companions, who were of the party, sided, of course, with the fair ones who were at the trouble to contribute their quota to the general entertainment; and the fastidious Eleanor having made it apparent to the whole neighbourhood, at the second day's races, that she was scarcely on speaking terms with Lady Caroline Dormer, and discountenanced Flora Dyrham's indiscreet sallies by fixing upon her the most uncomprehending looks of amazement whenever she hazarded an observation—a cabal was formed against her, in return, such as rendered it expedient to suffer, during dinner-time, from a severe headache, as a pretext for retiring immediately afterwards to her own room.

“I would not have accepted Sir Wolseley's invitation, had I known Lady Mortayne was to be here!” observed Mrs. Stratton Stretton, almost audibly, the moment she quitted the saloon—already provoked by having been forced to place in comparison with the delicate complexion of the still girlish Eleanor all that cosmetics and a dozen seasons of hot rooms had left extant of her own. “Lady Mor-

tayne fancies herself so very great a personage from having been permitted to leave the print of her foot in a circle where she had only to show herself to be voted below par, and dismissed without a character, that it is insupportable to find oneself placed at the mercy of her impertinence."

"Don't call it impertinence, my dear Mrs. Strat!" rejoined Lord Esher, to whom her observations were addressed. "Women, I notice, seldom give each other credit for their virtues; whereas with *us*, if a man be a good shot, or a capital jockey, we know better than to dispute his merits. You ought rather to honour the *constancy* of Lady Mortayne; who submits to get abused for finery and affectation, for boldly shamming a headache as an excuse for getting out of our way in order to indite to her beloved Charley Barrington an account of the *fiasco* of the crack race to-day, in time for to-morrow's early post!"

On the hint of scandal thus afforded, it was not difficult for the three slighted ladies to embroider with ingenuity. Each in her turn communicated by the "early post," to some London *confidante*, that "the Wolseley party had been spoiled by Lady Mortayne's wretched spirits, because divided by eighty miles from dear London, and all that it contained bearing the name of Barrington."

The unkindest cut of all, however, was devised by Lady Caroline Dormer; who, when Eleanor coldly declined accompanying the party to the race-ball, without assigning the smallest reason for absenting herself (by which, at the risk of offending her brother, she chose to mark her sense of superiority to the whole affair), explained in an audible whisper to Lord Esher, that it was not to be expected Lady Mortayne should appear at a public *fête*, when the morning papers announced Lord Heriford to be on his death-bed.

"But Maitland is as nearly related to the marquis as his sister?" remonstrated Lord Esher; "and my friend Woll is wise enough not to trouble his head about the matter!"

"You forget the *peculiarly* delicate circumstances of the case, as regards Lady Mortayne!" was Lady Caroline's preconcerted rejoinder. "She, you know, was brought up as a *sister* with the Ladies de Capell; and as regards Lady Alicia,—is still an inseparable *confidante* and friend! Yes!

strange as it may seem,—it would be impossible for *her* to go to the ball! The claims of friendship and Lady Alicia are sacred!”

Attacked *à coup d'épingles* on all sides, exposed to suspicion by the absence of Morty, and reduced to comparative insignificance by the loss of that devoted homage to which she was becoming only too well accustomed, Lady Mortayne began to discover that, hateful as the old hall had formerly appeared, it was doubly distasteful now that other women had the controlling voice in its arrangements; now that parties were planned on the lake for the diversion of the sentimental Lady Caroline, or equestrian expeditions in the woods, at the instigation of the knowing Mrs. Stratton; and above all, now that Sir Wolseley had taken to walking by moonlight on the terrace with Flora Dyrham, and quarrelling with all who, like Lord Esher, took the liberty of smiling at their proceedings, and prophesying that “poor Woll might, perhaps, find himself in for it, after all.”

Humble as was the kingdom taken from her, she could not bear to find herself lapsed into a secondary object where she had reigned supreme. No one *now* looked to her for orders,—no one even profited by her instigations. There, as elsewhere, she had bound no single soul to her service by personal attachment, because unsusceptible of personal attachment in return. Neither love nor regard are to be won by seeming; and those who go through the world endeavouring to create interests for themselves out of the mere gratifications of vanity, find in the end that they have set themselves the wizard's task of twisting ropes of the loose sea-sand.

The three showy belles whom Sir Wolseley had invited with the view of creating a sensation at the Hartstonge races, if not without speck or blemish, or rather if belonging to a class the announcement of whose names creates either a profound sigh or a significant smile, possessed at least sufficient *esprit de corps* to unite in opposition to the scornful lady, who chose to fancy that, “because *she* was virtuous, there were to be no more cakes and ale;” and their powers of mischief being as three to one, they contrived to render her thoroughly uncomfortable, by suddenly stopping short in their conversation whenever she entered the room;

or, on resuming it the moment they were able to reunite into a group, in some opposite corner, contriving that, amid their whispers, the name of Barrington should be audible. It was in short as clear from their deportment as though the word had been expressly pronounced, that they had no patience with an assumption of prudery on the part of the daughter of a Lady Maitland, or of the idol of Lady Alicia's husband.

But that Eleanor was aware of needing all her brother's indulgence—aware that every morning she received a letter from Charles Barrington, affecting, indeed, only to supply her in her rustic retreat with the London news; but, in reality, conveying that news in terms which, by persons of limited capacity, might have been easily mistaken for terms of endearment—she would probably have remonstrated with him on the bad style of society with which he was surrounded, and warned him against the danger of a flirtation with a girl so slippery as Flora Dyrham, whose three tall brothers were on the watch to nail to the wall, by way of atonement, the first kite they found stooping towards a bird whose feathers had been so often made to fly.

But she was afraid of provoking a retort. Sir Wolseley was no longer influenced by the tender mood in which he addressed her on his visit to Brook Street. He was not only provoked by her airs towards his friends, but enlightened by the revengeful sarcasms of those friends as to the extent of her flirtation. Convinced that she had deceived him—convinced that she was still deceiving her husband—he was by no means disposed to mercy.

It was, consequently, a relief to all parties when, after glancing over a few lines of the pompous half-column of the morning paper that announced the demise of "The Marquis of Heriford, Lord Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of the county of———" no matter what, the lady of the yachting lord announced her immediate return to town.

"She must lose no time in placing herself in mourning, in order to demonstrate her gratitude towards the family from which she had received so much kindness, by testifying all the respect in her power to the memory of the dead."

"I should have thought, Nelly, your mantua-maker and milliner were capable of relieving you from the trouble of a journey of nearly a hundred miles!" observed Sir Wolse-

ley, coldly, readily attributing her abrupt departure to the ill-will subsisting between his sister and his friends. "It strikes me, indeed, that you had better have awaited here the return of your husband. But you understand your own affairs best."

"I fear you will find London quite deserted," added Mrs. Stratton Stretton, affecting a smile of compassion. "From Goodwood, every one proceeded to the Brighton races!"

"I have little fear of finding a few friends remaining," replied Lady Mortayne, longing to reply that *her* notions of society were not limited within the circle of the sporting world.

"Of course. The Barringtons, I believe, are to be in town till after Lady Alicia's confinement, and it will be *so* kind of you to be at hand to comfort her just now, under her severe family bereavement!" rejoined Lady Caroline, too delighted at the prospect of getting rid of one who was so great a restraint upon their diversions to heed what offence she might give.

"Poor Lady Alicia!" added she, as the be-coronnetted travelling-carriage drove from the hall-door. "Since the days of Henry Bolingbroke, never was cousinly treachery so grossly practised as against *her* by Lady Mortayne!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Nothing like the reality of death to recall the frivolous classes of mankind to a sense of the realities of life.—SWIFT.

As the newspapers, with their wonted Dodd-ransacking industry, had duly cited among the noble families placed in mourning by the demise of the Marquis of Heriford, that of Lord Mortayne, it excited no surprise that her ladyship should abandon a party assembled on so festive a pretence as county races to return to the nearly abandoned metropolis. The baronet, her brother, indeed, though equally a cousin, having been passed over in the list of mourners as too small

for mention, Sir Wolseley pursued unmolested his hospitalities to such outsiders of the world of ceremony as the Dormers and Stratton Strettons. But from the wife of an ancient baron, stricter propriety was to be expected.

The London found by Lady Mortayne on her return, little resembled, however, the London she had left behind. A hollow sound prevailed in the now deserted streets; and from the closely-shuttered windows of the noble mansion facing her dreary, dusty home, hung long, seedy, yellow streamers of sickly and scentless mignonette; while a solitary housemaid, sole denizen of the dwelling lately so brilliant, looked out in helpless idleness all day from her attic window, as if for company sake, or, like sister Anne, to ascertain whether any one was coming, and to descry nothing but a cloud of dust.

Ashamed to proceed in quest of air and sunshine to the Park or Kensington Gardens, where none but the Mrs. Stratton-Stretton class of the community fag out the last days of the season on the parched herbage, under a shade scarcely less seared and withered, Lady Mortayne sat gasping for breath in her dull drawing-room, pondering within herself how far she might venture to resent the conduct of Lady Alicia, to whom—knowing her husband to have joined at Greensells the family assembled for the marquis's funeral, she had addressed an affectionate note, offering to sit with her, or make herself useful in any manner in her power, to which a verbal answer was returned of "Lady Alicia Barrington's compliments—At present she sees no company."

Satisfied, from long knowledge of her character, that filial affection had little share in her self-seclusion, Lady Mortayne regarded this message almost in the light of a declaration of war. The open strife she had long foreseen as imminent was, perhaps, about to commence. Lady Alicia had thrown the first stone.

That the angry Eleanor knew herself to be in the wrong was evident from the pains she took in self-vindication.

"However justified," was her secret argument with herself, "in resenting the preference which her husband is at no pains to conceal, at least she cannot be blind to the fact that I was the original object of his love; and that she left no means untried to disgust me with Charles as a

suitor, by representing him as a needy impostor, only that the coolness created by her treachery might provoke him into offering her his hand. Not once did Lady Heriford officiate as my *chaperon*, but Alicia took occasion to spoil my evening's pleasures, by rendering Charles's attentions the object of her ridicule! And if, as an inexperienced *débutante* in life, I was weak enough to fall into the snare, it is but just that she should pay the penalty of having marred two happy destinies by her own heartless manœuvres."

"I suppose you've heard of Henry de Capell's luck, my dear Lady Mortayne?" cried Lord Newbury, stopping her carriage in Regent Street, the day after her return to town, as she was wending her solitary way to Howell and James's, for the purchase of jet ornaments and other items of the luxury of woe.

"No, indeed," she replied, tolerating Lord Newbury's familiarity for the sake of his news. "Is he already returned to town? I fancied Lord Heriford's funeral had not yet taken place?"

"Not till Saturday. But I heard this morning from Henry. Henry, who is curious in pocket-handkerchiefs, wrote to beg I would look out for some mourning ones for him. Lord Heriford having left to each of his younger children twenty thousand pounds, instead of the ten they expected, Henry seems to think that *such* a governor is entitled to the broadest of hems!"

"The marquis was a very prudent, as well as a very prosperous man."

"A trump,—a regular brick!" returned Lord Newbury, with enthusiasm. "Fellows who, like me, have had a father, grandfather, and great-grandfather on the turf, understand the value of being the offspring of a worthy snob, like old Heriford, who fattened cattle instead of breeding racers; whose notions of a horse were limited to the broad-backed brutes that drew his family coach,—and of play, to a Christmas pool at commerce! A man who never dined without roast beef, or slept without family prayers! Just such a squaretoes, in short, as there is the making of in Clandon—I beg his pardon, in the present Marquis of Heriford. Do you remember, Lady Mortayne, what horrid

slow work we had of it, last Christmas at Heriford Castle, between Clandon's Tommy Two-Shoes airs of propriety, and the prison discipline of grandmama ? ”

“ I remember only a very pleasant party,” she replied, wishing to put an end to a *tête-à-tête*, which, in the nearly deserted streets where hackney coaches had now the crown of the causeway, was beginning to attract attention.

“ Oh ! you can't have forgotten grandmama — for I remember you were one of her victims ! ” retorted the philandering lordling. “ You and I were objects of her especial detestation. Even her grandchildren were no great favourites,—with the exception of Lady Sophia, who, as I suppose you know, she has adopted as her heir. Much better if she had left her money to Henry ! Henry would have made it spin. And where's the use of fortune to an ugly girl like that —whom, in spite of her seventy thousand pounds (but not in spite of her teeth), a man would as soon think of marrying, as of proposing to the effigy of Queen Anne.”

Seventy thousand pounds ! After all, then, Lord Mortayne had missed in the charming woman so much attached to him, an excellent match, as well as the best-assorted wife ! The conscious Eleanor could now understand the drift of an audible whisper between Lady Caroline Dormer, and Flora Dyrham, which she had overheard at Wolseley Hall, and which was probably intended to meet her ear,—expressive of compassion for some man (in whom she did not at *that* time recognize her husband), who, by snatching at a shadow in the water, had let slip a treasure !

“ Sir Alan Harkesley, Lord Bowbridge, and the rest, persuaded him that he could not afford to marry a woman with ten thousand pounds,” was Flora Dyrham's observation,—affecting to speak in a mysterious tone. “ But he has found a fortune four times as large, a much less profitable speculation ; and after all, his lofty love has become a capital *parti* ! ”

A cloud of chagrin overspread the ivory brow of Eleanor as she reflected on how many sides an advantage had been recently obtained over her.

“ I suppose you are going to-night to the Opera ? ” added Lord Newbury, gathering up his reins as if about to wish

her good-bye, and ride off; "though, as it is the last night, there will be no one there but the *artistes*."

"I have no thoughts of going. I permitted Lady Barbara before she went to Cowes, to give away the box for the remainder of the season."

"Ah, by the way, I forgot that you had been out of town," replied Newbury, "Rawdon was saying just now, at White's, that he saw you the other day at Hartstonge Races, with the angeliferous Dormer, Mrs. Strat, and two or three more of that *clique*; looking like Gulliver at Lilliput,—or, rather, as if you were shockingly afraid of catching the bumpkin fever! But he brought far worse news of your brother."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Eleanor, a little alarmed,—two days having elapsed since she quitted Wolseley Hall.

"Rawdon declares that, after being singed by Lady Caroline and fleeced by Mrs. Strat, Sir Wolseley had stooped so folly so far as to propose to Flora Dyrham!—a thing which no man of sane mind would have ventured, any time within the last fifteen years!"

"I am not much afraid of having her for a sister-in-law!" said Lady Mortayne, touching the check-string at the same time, as a signal to the coachman to proceed, and relieve her from all this fooling. And, with a smiling nod, Lord Newbury galloped off.

But though thus professing tranquillity, she could not disguise from herself that a man who fancied himself so knowing as Sir Wolseley, was only too likely to be taken in; and such a Lady Maitland established in her old home, amounted almost to exclusion of herself. And alas! she could not afford to lose either her brother or Wolseley Hall. If, already in her married life, there had been moments when the support of the one and shelter of the other appeared desirable, how likely that there might come a time when the protection of her brother would prove essential to her peace!

If he really thought of marrying Flora Dyrham, there was an end of all intimate intercourse between them,—an end of all hold upon the old terrace-room! Yet, however vexatious the mere supposition of such a match, the harassed Eleanor admitted the impossibility of remonstrance. She had not the smallest influence over his mind. She had done nothing to cultivate the affections which even the

coating of selfishness wherein he was enveloped by an injurious education, had been insufficient to extinguish. Disgusted, on her *début* in life, by his reckless expression of a wish that she should marry and release him from his responsibilities, instead of accomplishing the mission of her sex and inspiring him with kinder thoughts and feelings by her own warmth of sisterly affection, she had met coldness with coldness,—harshness with scorn; till the trees that should have extended their branches towards each other, to form a friendly and inseparable shade, creating support for themselves, and comfort for others who were to succeed them, stood isolated and apart in the landscape of life, as if severed by the thunder-stroke of a storm. And the influence of a storm it was, that thus divided them! The fatal consequences of their mother's fault was likely to pursue them to the grave. According to the fiat of Divine law, the sins of the parents were visited upon the children.

But, however Lady Mortayne might have neglected to cultivate the instincts of fraternal affection, she felt bitterly that the estrangement of the only human being on whom, saving her already estranged husband, she had a claim for attachment, would be an evil past reparation.

She had already learned from the solitude of her house since her return to town, that, while, encouraging the daily visits of Barrington, she had suffered her popularity to decline. If admired and followed in a ball-room, she was not skilled to endure herself in the ordinary relations of life. She had not supplied by friendly intimacies, the want of family connections. Her comings and goings were not, as with many women, a signal of joy or regret to an extensive circle. There was nothing genial in her feelings, as there was nothing genuine in her manners, to beget that cordiality which overlooks a thousand faults.

A sudden chill seemed to oppress her spirits, amid the cheerlessness of the empty streets and deserted houses of which the inhabitants were gone to be happy and beloved elsewhere, at the idea that at her early age,—but little past the epoch of girlhood,—she must depend henceforward upon the power of her beauty to create an interest in her favour. Like most people who discover that their destiny is *manqué*, the blame was laid wholly upon others. The wilfulness with

which she had thrown herself into the wrong path on overstepping the threshold of life, was left out of the balance.

Unluckily, the momentary compunction produced by apprehension of her brother's marriage, was soon converted into irritation, by a chance encounter with Sir John Hildyard at Andrews's door, whither she was driven in search of the last resource of the last *ennuyée* wearying out her listlessness in town,—a new novel.

"In London, my dear Lady Mortayne?" cried he, in undisguised amazement. "Have you been here long?—in that case, I have a thousand apologies to offer for not having called in Brook Street. But Morty wrote to me a week ago, from La Rochelle, mentioning that you were passing a month at Wolsey Hall; and I am at this moment on my way to execute a commission for him, in consequence of a letter received this morning, in which he apologizes for employing me, on the express grounds of your absence from town!"

"I returned sooner than I intended, in consequence of Lord Heriford's death."

"Ay, true!—I forgot the relationship," said Sir John, glancing at her black dress; "the party is probably broken up. But, of course, you are not going to stay in town in this infernal weather? One is shrivelled up like a leaf, by merely looking at the pavement! But let me hasten to ask your orders for Morty. Bowbridge and I start for Dover this very night, to sail to-morrow for Bordeaux, to join the Nantwiches. The benefit derived by your husband from change of air, has determined the duke to extend his tour; and we have promised (as perhaps you are aware), to meet them at Bayonne, and make a little excursion in the Pyrenees."

"I have not heard from Lord Mortayne since he left Cherbourg," said Eleanor, endeavouring to look unmoved under the mortification of learning all these particulars from a stranger. "I wrote to him at La Rochelle, entreating him to prolong a tour from which he seemed to derive so much benefit; and which my disqualifications as a sailor prevented my enjoying in his company."

"In that case," replied Sir John, as if somewhat relieved, "I fear it is useless to endeavour to persuade you to join him, with Bowbridge and myself, in the 'Water Nymph?'"

The fastest, and best got-up thing in the squadron! If the present wind holds, we shall be at Bordeaux on Sunday."

"A thousand thanks. I must not offer such an affront to the 'Amphion' as to change my mind," replied Lady Mortayne. "I will not even trouble you with letters; for with the chances of wind and tide against you, they would probably reach Bordeaux sooner by the post."

"I must content myself, then, with conveying to him the agreeable intelligence that I never saw you looking more blooming, and that your natal air has repaired all the ravages of the season!" retorted Sir John, with the complimentary flourish usually assumed by a man of a certain age towards a woman for whom he feels nothing. And Lady Mortayne, however keen her appetite for flattery, felt so conscious that the flush upon her cheek was the result solely of suppressed anger, that she could not but consider his compliment as ironical. After receiving the three fresh-looking marble-covered volumes, smelling of paste, that purported to supply excitement to her listless hours, from the hands of a deferential young gentleman who stood patiently with the title-page invitingly open, till the colloquy between the *belle* of the season and the fashionable *roué* leaning into her carriage was at an end,—she drove away, sadder, if not wiser than before.

In spite of all her gifts of youth and beauty,—rank and fortune,—in spite of having compassed what, amid the turmoil of her vain ambition as a *débutante* she held as the *ne plus ultra* of human happiness—her prospects were at that moment so uninviting, that, had even a woman on whom she relied as little as Lady Barbara Bernardo been in town, there was some danger of her being driven, by a craving after sympathy, into the folly of intrusting the secrets of her destiny to a worthless confidant.

A still more dangerous alternative suggested itself. A few hours would suffice to convey to Charles Barrington her complaints of the incivility of his wife,—the disregard of even the common courtesies of life evinced by Lord Mortayne,—and her suspicions that the want of *empressement* betrayed towards her by the world, arose from the unkind construction placed upon their intimacy.

But of this indiscretion, she fortunately stopped short.

Though aware that such a letter would be welcomed on bended knees, as by a devotee some sacred relic, instincts of common decency bad her refrain from addressing her admirer amid the solemnities of a house of death!

And well that she did so. For though the impassioned feelings with which Charles Barrington saw her depart for Wolseley Hall only a fortnight before, were far from diminished,—though her countenance remained perpetually hovering in his memory as the controlling influence of his destinies,—his mind had undergone a considerable revolution, under the influence of his mournful sojourn at Greensells.

A mere return to the spot which had instigated a union with Lady Alicia de Capell as a step that was to secure his prosperity in life, could not fail to remind him that the transfer of his homage from the *débutante* to Lord Heriford's daughter, was his spontaneous act and deed; and that his courtship had been as eager as if inspired by nobler motives.

But, independent of the estimate of his own conduct forced upon his recognition, there was something in the solemn aspect of the noble mansion, under whose roof the coffined clay of the owner lay an object of reverence more complete than had ever awaited the poor marquis in his life-time, which induced serious reflection. There was nothing great, nothing imposing, in the character of the deceased. He was not a man of genius; he was not a man of influence. The general sadness that prevailed throughout his household and estates arose solely from the regularity of his life, and the punctual discharge of his duties. He owed no man anything. He had disregarded no one's claims. His old servants, after leading a cheerful life under his sway, were liberally provided for by his will; and his tenants and dependants were prepared to follow him to the grave with the respect of well-earned loyalty. A good husband,—a good father,—a good master,—the conscientious order of his life, in all its relations, had created for him a pedestal more solid than men of transcendent talents or brilliant personal accomplishments are often fated to establish.

The profound reverence manifested towards the chamber where his remains lay enshrouded, impressed even the thoughtless young man who had hitherto regarded personal

respect as a tribute to great actions or heroic deeds, rather than to moral worth or kindness of nature.

The whole family was to follow its chief to the grave. The venerable mother of the marchioness had brought her beloved grandchild to take her part in the sad assemblage; and Lord and Lady Kilsythe were there, for the first time since the wedding of Lady Alicia, so as to constitute a formidable family phalanx of those entitled to resent his unkind neglect of his absent wife. Aware that reluctance to expose to observation the estrangement between them, and not the adduced cause of her situation, had alone prevented Lady Alicia from joining the family reunion at which she had requested him to be her representative, his severity towards her appeared in a more heinous light than he had ever yet regarded it. For, after all, she was as much sinned against as sinning. Whichever might be the first offender, he could not conceal from himself that the charm of his adored Eleanor's azure eyes was the true origin of his implacability.

It was the first time in his life that Charles Barrington had ever come in contact with the aspect of death; and the influence of that awe-striking spectacle was not lost. His heart was heavy within him. Amid the reverential hush of the house, the muffled tread of the servants, the whispering voices of the family, and the pomp of sables on every side, any recurrence to the vanities of the metropolis, or the vices that spring to life in that hot-bed of corruption, would have revolted his "better part of man."

When Lady Sophia, unsuspecting of the coldness existing between him and her sister, questioned him with the tenderest solicitude concerning the event which was about to afford her a new interest in life, he felt ashamed of having scarcely yet given it a thought. The attention of grandmama was luckily engrossed by those more solid items of family prosperity which it was not in her nature to overlook,—the income of the new marquis,—the jointure of her daughter,—and portions of her grandchildren. For had *her* peremptory voice interfered, his good resolutions might have been nipped in the bud.

But the mild tenderness of Lady Sophia disarmed him. There was something in her true, pure, rational, yet ever-

feminine nature, that made him reluctant to shock or offend such a sister-in-law.

But for these newly-awakened sentiments of decency, Charles Barrington must have been roused to the bitterest self-upbraiding by the terms of the following letter:—

“The papers inform us, my dear Charles,” wrote his cousin Maria, “that you are at Greensells, with the rest of the late Lord Heriford’s family; and I seize the occasion to write to you in a spot which I shall always consider the closing scene of our childhood’s intimacy. From the period of our visit there, new interests interposed to disunite us. But I do not feel the less privileged by ties of blood to address you with the frankness of a sister.

“That your mother has been some weeks my inmate, I need not inform you; nor need I attest the happiness caused by her visit. How often we talk of you and yours, you will also readily imagine. But you should not,—no, indeed, dearest Charles, you *should* not,—leave us to learn from chance, or the intelligence of the public journals, so much that concerns your happiness. In describing Lord Heriford’s death, the newspapers inform us that ‘his lordship’s family is assembled at Greensells, to attend his remains to the grave, with the exception of Lady Alicia Barrington, who remains in town, awaiting her accouchement.’

“Cannot you fancy, dear cousin, the emotion experienced by my poor aunt at this announcement? Cannot you fancy how fondly she is disposed to love a child of yours, and how proud we shall all feel of your son? Since the paper conveying the news reached Hexholm, we have talked and thought of nothing else! All our wishes are realized! Henceforward, your household happiness is complete. You will have something of your own to care for—something of your own to live for. I shall have no need to wish you less deeply involved in the vortex of fashion that I may have the better chance of hearing your name pronounced with honour among those of the benefactors of your country. It is whispered that, at present, you are an idle member of the house! No matter! *Now*, you will have motives for exertion.

“Shall you think me very *very* presuming, or do you think Lady Alicia will take it amiss, if I ask leave, should

the expected babe be a girl, to officiate as one of its god-mothers? If a boy, the post will be a solitary one; bespoken, no doubt, by Lady Heriford; or, if not, due to your own dear mother; and in that case I must wait for your second child. But should all be as I wish, do not—*do not* refuse me!

“And now, dearest Charles, farewell. We unite in a thousand good wishes. To your father I need not allude; for, near as you are to him at Greensells, you have doubtless visited Easton Hoo.”

But that he had promised Lord Henry to accompany him to town immediately after the funeral the following day, upon this hint (from one whom he revered nearly as much as he was *bound* to reverence her) Charles Barrington *would*, perhaps, have made his way to Easton; not, as he at first intended, to see the improvements that were going on, but as a token of respect to his father. For, under the example of the present Marquis of Heriford, filial piety was beginning to assume, in his sight, the goodly form of virtue.

He had, however, made his arrangements; and Henry, who was in low spirits, would be annoyed at having to perform his journey alone.

Moreover,—but this argument he did not adduce to himself as a motive—the papers of the day announced the return of Lady Mortayne to Brook Street. And, though resolved to recede by imperceptible degrees from the *liaison* springing up between them, and endeavour to re-knit the broken ties of his domestic happiness, it was necessary that they should meet,—it was necessary that he should place before poor Eleanor some explanation of his conduct.

Besides, she had an account to render of her own. What reason would she give, he should like to know, for having broken her promise of writing to him from Wolseley? Did *she*, too, regret and repent the past?

CHAPTER XXXVII.

O thou weed
 Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet,
 That the sense aches at thee,
 Would thou hadst ne'er been born !—SHAKSPEARE.

By the time Charles Barrington approached London, some portion of the good resolutions bequeathed by Consideration (after coming, according to Shakspeare's simile, like an angel, and whipping the offending Adam out of him), had melted into air. His brother-in-law, Lord Henry, was one on whom impressions, however strong at the moment, were as transient as on the shifting sand ; and, as with every succeeding mile, the sadness produced by the gloomy scene from which they were emerging gave place, progressively, to his ordinary mood of mind, his railleries and boastings, empty as they were, had in some degree the effect of rendering less urgent in the eyes of his companion, the wise system of reform he was contemplating.

"Yes ! I think I see you and Alice settled at some quiet place in the country !" cried his lordship, in answer to Barrington's disclosure of his projects for the autumn. "I agree with you that people with a family ought to have a *piéd à terre*. But, hang it, unless a place in the country be one's own, one passes one's life in trenching another man's vineyard ! And you do not, you say, mean to purchase !"

"I have not sufficient ready money at my command to establish myself at once as I would wish," replied Barrington ; "and in the event of my father's death, my mother would be quite ready to give up Easton ; which, shocked as you may be by the avowal, I still consider an improvable place."

"As a shooting-box. Ay ! I grant you that you might make it liveable enough, as a shooting-box !"

"And the vicinity to Greensells would, of course, recommend the place to Lady Alicia," added his brother-in-law.

"*Entre nous*, I doubt whether Alicia's family affection be

strong enough to reconcile her to the loss of so much as half a dozen feet square in the proportions of her drawing-room!" retorted Henry. "However, if Clan makes up his mind to spend part of the year in his fishy dominions, I suppose it will be less disagreeable to her to be a minnow in waters of which the triton is of her own kith and kin! But I'll tell what you must do, Charley. You must persuade that dove-eyed cousin of yours to relent in my brother's favour (for I will be hanged in chains if ever he marries any one else!)—and *that* would create a neighbourhood for you, at once. For the life and soul of me, I can't fancy Alice settled in the country without a good *chef* and *salle à manger à cinquante couverts*, within easy reach of her *taudis*."

A sigh escaped poor Charles while he listened to an announcement that augured so ill for the domestic happiness he was vaguely contemplating; and right glad was he that, for the rest of their journey, Lord Henry's talk was of French actresses, and the iniquity of railway interdictions against cigars;—for there was something corrosive in the words of his lips when they touched upon sacred subjects.

It was agreed between them, that Henry should proceed with his companion to Arlington Street, to dine without ceremony with his sister. Lady Alicia must have a thousand inquiries to satisfy, concerning her father's last moments; and Lord Henry saw little that was inviting, at that moment, in his bachelor apartments at poor, dreary Heriford House with the achievement newly affixed over its portal, to interfere with his acquiescence in the plan. His mother and sisters were already on their way to Warleigh; the marchioness having been persuaded by Lady Kilsythe that, after their long attendance on the deceased marquis, the searching breezes of the Dorsetshire coast would prove an invaluable restorative.

The two brothers-in-law stepped, therefore, into the same cab, at the terminus, leaving their servants and baggage to follow; and it was between seven and eight o'clock when they reached the West-end,—the hour at which the stragglers of the *beau monde* wend clubward or homeward to their dinner.

"After all," observed Lord Henry, as they approached

Arlington Street, "notwithstanding the rubbish one talks about the ever-ready comfort of White's, and the warm welcome of an hotel, as the old Duke of Marlborough said of Blenheim, 'home is home, be it ever so homely!' And right glad shall I be of a corner of Alice's sofa, and a dish of Pointd'ail's cutlets."

Even his companion sympathized warmly in the sentiment. After the sadness of the scene they had left behind, Charles Barrington admitted that it would be soothing to enter a cheerful habitation; nor, since the day he started with his bride from Heriford Castle, had his feelings been so kindly disposed towards her.

On arriving at his own door, he was a little surprised to find the shutters closed.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this?" cried Lord Henry, jumping from the cab. "Do you keep such early hours, Barrington, as to shut up shop by daylight?"

In another moment, the door was opened by Lady Alicia's own man, and the mystery explained.

"My lady is out of town, sir," said the footman, whose arms had scarcely found time to shuffle themselves into his new black livery. "We were not expecting you till Monday."

"Out of town?" reiterated the indignant brother; "a pretty dodge, upon my word!" But the indignant husband seemed to look for further explanations.

"Lady Coylsfield called yesterday afternoon, sir," resumed the servant, in reply to his mute interrogation, "and finding my lady rather low, persuaded her ladyship to accompany her to Haresfield. Lady Alicia left word, in case you should arrive, that she should return on Monday morning."

"Kind and considerate enough of the Coylsfields!" observed Barrington, turning to Lord Henry. Lady Coylsfield doubtless felt that, Alicia's whole family being out of town, it would be too great a trial for her to be left *quite* alone on the day of the funeral."

And while echoing, as was expected, the exclamation of "kind and considerate enough," Lord Henry took it for granted that his brother-in-law, or Mrs. Barrington, had

written to secure for Lady Alicia the good offices of their somewhat frigid cousins.

"This is not exactly what we expected, my dear fellow," said Barrington, shrugging his shoulders with an air of self-commiseration at the close of the explanation; "but no matter! everything will be set to rights for us, in a minute or two. Throw open the drawing-room windows, Robert, towards the park; and let Pointd'ail know that Lord Henry dines with me, that he may get dinner ready as soon as possible."

The shutters were opened in a moment, to admit the melancholy gleam of the evening sun; but having completed the operation, Robert approached with a mysterious whisper towards his master.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that Pointd'ail is not at home; my lady being absent, and you, sir, not expected before Monday, he is gone to prepare a cabinet dinner at Lord Pegwell's."

"The deuce he is! My dear Henry, this is indeed an unlucky look out! But I promise you that Pointd'ail has found an apt scholar in the kitchen-maid, who dressed an admirable dinner for us, one day when the fellow was ill."

"I am extremely sorry, 'sir,'" again interposed Robert, "but Mary has stepped to Chelsea to see her mother.—We all understood, sir, from her ladyship, that you were not to be at home before Monday."

"You seem to have done an amazingly impertinent thing, Charley, in making your appearance in your own house before you were looked for!" cried Lord Henry, vexed at such a series of *contretemps*.

"If the thing had happened on any other occasion," pettishly retorted Charles, "I could have sworn it was a trick intentionally played by Lady Alicia. But I will not suspect her of a vexatious act on such a day as this!"

"We have but one resource," said Lord Henry. "Dusty and tired as we are, I am not quite up to White's. Let us go and dine quietly, and *incog.* at the University—where we shall not meet a soul of our acquaintance."

"To say the truth, I am so cut up by my journey, that I would rather dine on a mutton chop, or a crust of bread

at home," said Barrington, whose quick eye had already detected in the bundle of letters and notes placed in his hand by Robert, one, of a nature that inclined him strongly to get rid of his brother-in-law. "*En revanche*, my dear fellow, you must dine here on Monday, when Lady Alicia will be at home."

"And Pointd'ail at home, which is ten times more to the purpose," retorted Henry de Capell. "On Monday, I shall be better up to the thing; and as our cab is still waiting, it may as well carry me at once to my destination."

And before the vehicle conveying the affectionate brother-in-law to whom the offer of a mutton-chop dinner sounded very much like a threat of arsenic, turned the corner of Arlington Street, Barrington had hastily run his eye over a note, the hand-writing of which, however tremulously traced, was not to be mistaken for any other than that of Lady Mortayne.

"Come, come, dear C., the moment—the very moment—you arrive in town!" wrote the guilty Eleanor, who appeared to have suddenly laid aside all fear, and all restraint,—“ I *must* see you without delay.”

Willingly would her astonished correspondent have complied, dinnerless, with the commands laid upon him. But, as he had not refreshed himself since he attended the remains of his father-in-law to the family vault, a change of dress was indispensable;—and more than an hour elapsed, and night was come, and the lamps were lighted, before he made his appearance in Brook Street.

After the dreariness of the deserted house he had quitted, how cheerful appeared its lights—its flowers—its alert attendance! What a soothing atmosphere, and what a welcome to shake his good resolutions, and place him, where he had found himself before in the same fatal spot, at the feet of the lovely mistress of a home too attractive! Announced at once by the servants as though he were an expected guest, nothing unusual startled him in the appearance of Eleanor, unless the dazzling whiteness of skin produced by contrast with the deep mourning she wore. But no sooner had the butler retired, than, on fixing his eyes upon the lovely face which had never before struck him as half so lovely, he saw at once that something was grievously amiss

—that her frame and countenance were convulsed by some secret emotion. The woman usually so self-possessed, was for some minutes incapable of uttering a syllable.

“ My dear Lady Mortayne,—my dearest, dearest Eleanor,—for God’s sake, what is the matter? What—what has happened?” cried he, almost as much disturbed as herself.

Still, instead of replying, she struggled with her tears; and the expression of any *real* emotion in that ever-smiling face, seemed to impart new charms to its feminine delicacy of feature.

At length, suddenly extricating from his grasp one of the hands that were fondly and pleadingly pressed within his own, she drew from her bosom a letter,—as if it purported to afford him the explanations she had not breath to utter.

“ From Mortayne!” cried he, glancing at the superscription, ere he tore it open, and saw that it was dated from La Rochelle, the preceding week.

“ Having ceded to the wishes of my friends the Nantwiches,” wrote poor Morty, “ that I should accompany them to the Pyrenees, I feel that some explanation is necessary of an absence you will probably resent. Resent it! It is my *wish* that you should do so! Steeped as I am, to the very lips, in bitterness and misery,—bitterness and misery to which I shall not, either now or at any future time, more explicitly advert,—I would fain have you understand, without further explanation on my part, that our union must be henceforward as that of mere acquaintance.

“ I am fully sensible of the seeming harshness of this announcement. But it is as wholly without remedy, as my mind is without comfort, and my heart without hope. Better, perhaps, were we to part altogether;—for the part I have to play may prove too trying for my forbearance. But so young,—so lovely,—for *you*, Eleanor, I dread the results of such a step,—both as regards your own happiness and the honour of the name you bear. Resolve, therefore, I entreat you, to meet me on my return with the guarded feelings and deportment which can alone enable us to reside under the same roof.

“ Would—would—that I had gone to my grave un-

enlightened!" wrote the miserable husband, insensibly relaxing as he proceeded, from the severe tone he had imposed upon himself. "Would that I could have been spared the anguish now gnawing into my heart. But the malice of that hateful woman, Lady Alicia (provoked, perhaps, by what she considers my ill-usage of her sister), has avenged itself in the form of a fatal—a maddening revelation. And' oh! may curses light upon her for the deed which has rendered life a burthen to me!

"One line addressed to me at Bayonne, to satisfy me that you have received this, or how shall I find courage to return to England—to my miserable, my desecrated home!"

"He knows all, then!" faltered Charles Barrington, crumpling up the letter with a movement of rage, that would fain have expended itself on the writer instead of on that senseless paper, "and probably *more* than all! That accursed woman who, from first to last, my poor, injured Eleanor, has been the bane of our happiness, has, doubtless, created in his mind suspicions far beyond the truth!"

"But for the conviction of my guilt, Mortayne would not, I am convinced, have written thus!" replied Lady Mortayne, with quivering lips and streaming eyes.

"And what have you done? Have you written to him as he desires?"

"Not a word!"

"But you *will* write?"

"No. Since he chooses to asperse me unjustly, be it so!"

"But unless you attempt some self-vindication—as heaven knows you are entitled to do—the breach between you will become irreparable!"

"And do you suppose that I wish it otherwise? What arguments could I use to my husband to prove myself innocent? *Am* I innocent? Can I deny my preference for another?—can I deny that I have listened to protestations from that other of the fondest attachment?"

"Heaven be thanked! you can *not*," replied her enamoured companion. "But, for both our sakes, Eleanor, is it wise to provoke further the wrath of this man? The feelings excited by Lady Alicia's envious misrepresentations might still be tranquillized, and his whole confidence re-

stored. *Your* influence, if you chose it, might obliterate every vestige of suspicion from his mind."

"*My* influence? As if I would condescend to exercise it for a purpose so base! No! Charles, no! The worst which I have risked, I will abide. Lady Alicia has accomplished what I had always had reason to suppose her purpose—my utter—*utter* ruin."

"It was, doubtless, the cowardly consciousness of what she has done," cried the enraged husband, "that drove her out of town, in the expectation of my arrival. The sudden *empressement* of the Coylsfields seemed a little extraordinary. I see, now, that she was cunning enough to secure herself a refuge with those whom, of all others, she knew to have the strongest claim on my deference. Lady Alicia was aware that I should hesitate about an exposure of this unhappy business before *them*. But the danger is not over. In a day or two, at furthest, she must return home, and *then*—"

"And then, dear Charles, her situation must exonerate her from the reproaches and punishment she deserves!" pleaded Lady Mortayne.

A cruel imprecation burst from the lips of Barrington at this allusion to her claims on his forbearance.

"And what, then, are your views and wishes?" whispered he, in an altered tone, turning, after a moment's pause, to address the weeping woman by his side. "From the tenor of Mortayne's letter, it is clear that he only waits to hear from you to return to England. This letter is dated a week back, and, at this time of year, a couple of days would bring them across."

"Yes, I am aware that his arrival may be hourly expected," replied Lady Mortayne. "And my retreat to Wolseley Hall is now, alas! cut off. This evening's paper announces my brother's rash marriage with that odious Flora Dyrham!"

"Surely, however, you will not remain here to meet your husband?" pleaded Barrington. "All that passes in London, however secretly, is sure to find an echo. The whole affair would soon get whispered about. Nay, perpetually surrounded by his intimates, Mortayne could scarcely fail to confide his domestic troubles to one or other of them."

"He has most likely already done so," replied Eleanor, in

a tone of calm desperation. "In this letter, which is so unlike himself, I discern the promptings of the Duke of Nantwich, who, through life, has dealt so remorselessly by his wife!"

"Confound both him and his advisers!" was the involuntary ejaculation of one who, however proud to figure in the eyes of the world as the favoured admirer of the lovely Eleanor, had no mind to abide the penalty of his happiness. For the vision of a quiet home and honourable position in society, which had lately begun to find favour in his sight, had not yet forfeited its charm under the influence of the touching looks fixed upon him, or the tendril-like hair that floated on his shoulder.

"But in that case," resumed he, after a short reverie, far from advantageous to the cause of the woman who was watching with secret emotion every turn of his countenance,—"in that case, there is double reason for desiring that your meeting should take place in the country. At Mortayne, he would be left entirely to the influence of your eloquence,—of those words and looks which no living mortal could resist!"

"Ay, at Mortayne, unrestrained by fear of the reproaches of the world, he would not only forgive the past, but take me to his arms again as his wife. And this is what you wish! And this is what you counsel!" cried she, with a frantic laugh, clasping her hands together with impassioned energy, at the detection of what she considered as his cold-blooded egotism. "You,—*you*, who have made me what I am!—so wretched—so degraded—would have me live a life of falsehood; swearing with plausible hypocrisy to love and honour the man I have betrayed, and whom you have taught me to regard with loathing!"

"It is for *your* sake I would fain suggest temporizing measures," her deeply-moved companion was beginning.

"No, no, Charles! Do not deceive yourself!" cried she, interrupting him. "It is for your own,—only for your own! You dread the consequences of the storm of guilt and misery you have conjured up. You are afraid of what the world will say,—of what Lady Alicia and the De Capell family will urge to your discredit, should you

openly support my defiance of the rights and authority of Lord Mortayne!"

"Compose yourself, Eleanor!" remonstrated he, more shocked than touched by her violence. "I am afraid of *nothing*, unless to see you wantonly compromise your happiness and honour."

"Look at the nature of the happiness you accuse me of compromising! Consider for a moment my unfortunate destinies!" resumed Lady Mortayne, a little subdued by the tenderness with which he endeavoured to soothe her, by again taking her hand. "Inexperienced in the forms and usages of society, Lady Heriford,—with what views, she best can tell,—undertook to supply towards me, on my entrance into the world, the place of a mother; and, at *that* time, Lady Alicia, with all the consummate art of her nature, affected to treat me with the affectionate frankness of a sister. And what was the consequence? That, noting the preference with which, from our first interview, you inspired me,—she made you the object of her unceasing derision! Every defect she could detect in your person,—manners,—dress,—position,—was enlarged upon with the bitterest exaggeration. Not content with the mockery lavished upon yourself,—your family,—your residence,—your condition,—she seized upon my own innocent affection for you, to be made the subject of her epigrams and caricatures; till, by incessant sarcasm, she taught me to blush for the strength of my attachment,—pretending to have learnt from ear-witnesses, your boast that my fortune alone attracted you, and determined you to obtain my hand."

"Liar!" interrupted Charles Barrington, in a transport of rage, which he was unable to repress. "May God forgive her iniquity! Lady Alicia, and every member of her family, knew only too well from Henry (who then pretended to be my friend), that my poverty alone prevented my hazarding a proposal!"

"And thus, by degrees, she weaned me from you," added Lady Mortayne, almost intimidated by his fury. "By degrees she persuaded me that you regarded me only in the light of a match to be secured; and that, in conversation with herself and others, not one of my girlish faults

and weaknesses escaped your irony. What appeared to be ample confirmation of her assertions was not wanting. No sooner did I endeavour to ascertain the real nature of your feelings towards me, by affecting to encourage the attentions of my cousins, Clandon and Henry, than you openly devoted your addresses to Alicia!"

"Could you only conceive the duplicity with which her two-fold treachery was carried on!"

"I *can* conceive it,—for experience has enlightened me, to my cost!" retorted Lady Mortayne. "I know her now;—I know with what heartless self-possession she can inflict torture upon those whose hands are clasped affectionately in her own! But at that time, Charles, I was not so much as entitled to reproach her. With dexterous cunning, she had made me commit myself in presence of her family by seeming acquiescence in mockeries of her own suggestion, such as appeared to express indifference on *my* part that justified fickleness on your own. What art—what artifice prevailed against me! What a complication of treachery sealed the misery of my life! Deserted and humiliated, I was thankful to Lord Mortayne for the homage which at such a crisis served to raise me in my own estimation. In a rash moment of gratitude, I accepted his proposals,—in a rash moment of desperation, gave him my hand!"

"And do you imagine," argued Charles Barrington, deeply moved by her avowals, "that I was less a victim than yourself? The same manœuvres, so successful in your case, were not less so in mine. My memory, thank God, does not serve me to repeat the sneering sarcasms cited by Lady Alicia, as the result of your visit to Easton Hoo. From *her* I learned that you regarded me as a mere fortune-hunter,—a designing adventurer. And curses upon the mean credulity of human nature, that induced me to lend a too ready ear to her mischiefs, without appealing at once to yourself for an honest avowal of your feelings!"

"But why do we recur to all this?" cried Eleanor, starting from her seat, and impetuously pacing the room. "The evil is now irremediable. From her first act of injury to her last, Lady Alicia has only been too successful. The husband forced upon me by her arts, has, at length, by her arts, been converted into an enemy. And with that enemy,

Charles, I am to pass the remainder of my days! Young as I am, what a prospect lies before me!—the seclusion of Mortayne Manor, in company with an irritated and peevish tyrant! But, on this point, I have made up my mind. Await the return of Lord Mortayne, I neither can nor will. The life I have hitherto led with him disgusts and maddens me; and how much more bitter will it become, when the galling superiority with which he regards and teaches others to regard me, is justified by what he has lately learned!”

“My dearest Eleanor,—ill as it may become me to preach patience to you,” said Charles,—

“It does, indeed, ill become you!” interrupted Lady Mortayne; “for to *you* is owing my whole amount of wretchedness! Had you at first been candid with me,—had you— But why, *why* do I reproach you?” cried she, flinging herself once more distractedly on the sofa by his side, on perceiving how profound and sincere was his sympathy. “I see,—I see that you are scarcely less miserable than myself; and every pang you feel, doubles the anguish of my own.”

A violent burst of tears relieved the oppression of her heart. But this ebullition of feeling served only to increase the storm of passion raging in that of her companion. Regarding her as a victim to her affection for *him* as well as to the treachery and malice of Lady Alicia,—how was he to contemplate with less than that indulgence towards youth and beauty inherent in the bosom of every man, the lovely woman so helplessly submitted to her misplaced attachment!

“And what would you have me do, Eleanor?” whispered he, at length, after having vainly endeavoured to tranquillize her growing perturbation.

“Any thing, rather than bid me return to the arms of the man I fear and loathe! Rather would I be lying senseless on the stones under yonder window,” continued she, in a tone of exasperation, pointing to one still open to admit the night breezes from the adjacent park, which gently waved the draperies of the muslin curtain. “Rather seek peace in an untimely grave, than degrade myself by mean submission, and hourly hypocrisy!”

“You have resolved, then, to rend asunder at once the ties that bind you to your husband and society?”

“I have! Mortayne has generously left me the alternative. He suggests measures which I firmly decline. I will *not* live with him on the terms he proposes! My whole soul revolts against such a system of imposture. By his express desire, my fortune was placed by our marriage settlements at my own disposal; nor is he the man to interfere, or wish to interfere, with such an arrangement. I am rich, therefore; in any other country than England, rich enough to command the utmost comforts of my station. I will go abroad. I will seek tranquillity in countries where the paltry distinctions of prudish England,—that slave of *cliques* and *coteries*,—exercise no control!”

At that moment, it was impossible for the harassed and bewildered man she was addressing, not to revert to the wayward culpabilities of the mother of the misguided being before him,—exiled through life, by her own misconduct, from the decencies of her native land; who, on finding in him the husband of a De Capell, had addressed to him at Paris that touching letter of supplication, which, by nearly falling into the hands of Lady Alicia, had accidentally become the source of so many evils; though purporting only to obtain information concerning the destinies and dispositions of the son and daughter, known to her but by name; and imploring him never to reveal to *them* the identity of the mother they had been taught to believe in the grave, with the profligate and notorious Comtesse de St. Chamond.

Was there, indeed, a blight upon the nature and happiness of the family? Was this younger and fairer offshoot of a time-honoured line also predestined to pollution?

“But do not imagine,” resumed Eleanor, unable to interpret the mournful reverie into which he had fallen, “that I wish *you*,—the origin of all this misery,—to become the partner of my flight! To *your* enjoyment of existence, the fine world, with its senseless ceremonies and empty pretensions, is indispensable. That lesson, at least, you have learned from Lady Alicia! In that ambition, your tastes are henceforward identified. Remain, therefore, Charles!—remain to derive what happiness you may from the pompous pleasures of London life. Number over your lordly guests; and, hand in hand with the woman who has so basely trampled upon me, devote yourself to domestic felicity.

city with a partner to whom your origin is contemptible, and your person indifferent! Forget that you ever thought me worthy your wooing! Forget the fond affection which, in spite of my better reason, I am still unable to withhold!"

"No, Eleanor! again and again, no!" cried Charles Barrington, seizing her hand, and pressing it wildly to his brows, his eyes, his lips. "Since so fearful a step is to be taken, we must take it together. If you quit the country, worse than death would be my portion, were I to remain. Let Lady Alicia content herself with the pity and approval of the world! On *her* no blame will rest. To *her* no harm can come. A powerful family is on the spot to afford her support. It is not with her as with thee, my poor, helpless Eleanor! I will secure to her, not only her own fortune, but more than half my own; how gladly sacrificed, for the privilege of enjoying, far from her and her hateful community, the love and peace of which she has worked so hard to deprive me!"

But why attempt to unravel the sophistry by which two persons, devoid of principle, endeavoured to blind each other to the heinousness of their projects! Suffice it, that before that memorable evening closed, their plans were definitely formed; not deliberately, indeed, but with the impetuosity characteristic of those, who, having overleapt the barriers of decency, proceed as though they could not rush too blindly and wilfully on their destruction!

"They met in madness, but in guilt they parted!"

only, however, to meet on the morrow with every preparation completed to quit for ever a spot where their intimacy had commenced amid the levities of a ball-room, to lead them by slow degrees, characterized at every step by vain and heartless selfishness, to a conclusion bringing shame on all belonging to them; and to themselves, a double portion of misery and repentance!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A graver, mightier, and more solemn sense
Of all that hallows woman's holiest tie,
Woke in the woman's soul.—SIR E. BULWER LYTTON.

“LET us hasten to London,—I entreat you let us hasten to London: it is only on the spot we can ascertain the exact truth of this grievous business!” exclaimed Maria to the heart-broken mother of Charles Barrington, to whom her son despatched a few lines, on the eve of quitting England, beseeching her to break to his cousin the wretched climax of his misfortunes; and entreating that both would place the most merciful construction in their power upon the heinousness of his fault. “Do not,” added Maria, with all the warmth of her womanly nature, “do not withhold your countenance from his poor deserted wife!”

“Lady Alicia has hosts of friends,—Lady Alicia belongs to a powerful and numerous family!” replied Mrs. Barrington. “She needs, my dear Maria, no consolation from *us*. What has hitherto been a source of grief to me, is now my comfort,—that no real attachment ever united her to my son.”

“Not when she married him, perhaps; I grant you that she did not care for him *then*. But remember how long they have lived together! She *must* love him now,—*now* that she is about to become the mother of his child;—and think what must be the trial of finding herself abandoned at such a moment! Oh, aunt, dear aunt, let us go to her; let us learn all she has to disclose; let us palliate all she has to complain of. You see what Charles says in his postscript:—‘Maria is the only human being, except yourself, who will hold a kindly feeling in reserve to welcome my unfortunate child.’”

“Well, then,—let us go,” replied Mrs. Barrington, in a hoarse and broken voice. “If we do not comfort *her*, we shall at least comfort ourselves.”

Lady Alicia was, however, far more than they dreamed of, an object of pity. On her arrival in Arlington Street, from

Haresfield, full of the anxieties produced by a disclosure of the *liaison* formerly existing between Lord Mortayne and the Comtesse de St. Chamond, accidentally made to her, some days before, by one of her foreign acquaintance (who cited it in proof of Morty's *rouéism*, in utter ignorance of the relationship between the Maitlands and one of the most worthless of her sex), she was apprised by the servants, who saw nothing to be concealed in the occurrence, that their master had left town the preceding evening. Even when they placed in her hands the brief and cruel letter of farewell addressed to her by her husband, intimating that she was to see him no more, how were they to surmise the nature of its overwhelming contents?

A long, long fit of insensibility fortunately relieved her from the acuteness of the pang produced by her full perception of the truth. Conscious that there existed *some* justification of her husband's bitter assertion that all which was befalling her was decreed by the retributory justice of heaven, she looked around, and vainly, for some friend into whose bosom she could pour the story of her griefs. Mother, —sisters,—brothers,—all were absent from town. Even Lady Coylsfield, on parting from her that morning, had proceeded to the Isle of Wight; and her foreign attendants, terrified by the excess of her affliction, had not courage to utter a word. There was not one,—*not one*,—to say—“where is your pain?” or “whom shall we send for to exhort you to courage under your sufferings!”

Before night, however, the case became too urgent for demur. It was a nurse,—it was a medical attendant, rather than her friends, whose services were in request. Till morning, the unfortunate lady languished and suffered. Throughout the following day, the hands of menials wiped the cold dews of agony from her brow; and when, towards evening, she was informed that she was the mother of a son, no one was present to hail with a kiss of welcome the babe that struggled so friendlessly into a world of woe!

The physicians, to whom the absence of Mr. Barrington from town was represented by the servants as accidental, thought it right to inquire of their noble patient, as soon as her strength and composure were sufficiently restored, whether her husband was likely to return on the morrow, or

whether it might be desirable to communicate the event that had taken place. But the mere allusion to his name produced symptoms so unsatisfactory, that it was judged better to leave all to chance. Lady Alicia's numerous friends would, doubtless, undertake the announcement.

The upper servants, on the other hand, took it for granted that, by her ladyship's desire, Dr. L—— would communicate to the family at Warleigh the news of her safety; for almost the first words uttered by Lady Alicia after the event, consisted in an express interdiction against announcing in the newspapers the birth of her son and heir. She did not choose that the fugitives should learn it through such a channel.

But to *choose* at all, at such a moment, was a perilous exertion. The whirl of emotion which, even had no unusual stress of nature existed, might have sufficed to produce indisposition, increased to a fatal degree, in Lady Alicia's present weak state, the burning fever in her veins. The thought of her little son,—the son for whom it behoved her to live,—the son for whom, even in her premature widowhood, she might still form projects of happiness or ambition,—ceased to convey definite ideas to her mind. Before the close of the third day, delirium succeeding to stupor, released her from further anguish.

Alarmed at their master's prolonged absence, and ignorant where to address him, the servants, anxious to be relieved from their responsibility, suggested to their lady's medical attendants that a letter should be instantly despatched to Greensells to the Marchioness of Heriford, acquainting her with Lady Alicia's dangerous condition. But even this failed to secure the prompt attendance of her family. Another day must elapse before the communication, duly forwarded, could reach Warleigh.

When, therefore, the gentle mother and cousin of Charles Barrington approached the house in Arlington Street, which in its more brilliant days they would have hesitated to enter, their arrival was hailed with joy by the terrified household, who had begun to fear that their lady would breathe her last unsoled in her dying moments by a kindred hand or heart; and though the new comers were strangers among

them, the mildness of their lady-like deportment commanded confidence and respect.

So alarming, on the other hand, was the account rendered to the travellers of the state of the invalid, that even Maria scarcely allowed herself a momentary glance at the beautiful infant placed by the nurse in her arms, to be sanctified by the first kiss of affection imprinted on its little cheek. Not a moment was to be lost in gaining the sick chamber.

On entering the darkened room where lay the unhappy object of their solicitude, a low moaning sound alone proclaimed that the unfortunate Lady Alicia yet breathed and suffered; exhaustion having succeeded to the paroxysms of frenzy. She was not, however, yet, fully sensible. Her faint, but incessant whispers were as incoherent as, before, her passionate upbraidings; and when she murmured the names of Eleanor and her husband, it was with the same wild accusations of treachery and deceit.

“I knew not that it was her mother!” faltered she. “No, Charles,—as Heaven is my judge,—I knew not that it was her mother! Forgive me, forgive me;—I am not wholly to blame. You were too peremptory. You should have confided more in me. Am I not your wife? Was I not entitled to know all? Charles, you should have trusted me,—you should have trusted me!—and then, your child would not have been born fatherless,—an outcast on the face of this bitter, bitter earth!”

Though unable to affix any rational interpretation to the words of the sufferer, Miss Barrington felt convinced that some sad mystery existed;—some mystery which she trusted might assign some slight exoneration to her cousin,—since the dying Lady Alicia claimed forgiveness, and admitted herself to be also in fault.

Having instantly dismissed their carriage and announced their intention of passing the night beside the sufferer, Maria and the horror-stricken Mrs. Barrington devoted themselves, without hesitation, to attend upon that haughty being who, in her pride of health, had never accosted them with a kindly word; and who was now dying, neglected by her fashionable friends, and forgotten by all!

Towards morning, after a short cessation of her moans

which inclined the watchful Maria to hope that she was asleep, the words of the invalid, though fainter, became more rational. Recrimination upon others gave place to self-accusation.

“I have lived without God in the world!” was one of her terrible avowals. “Neither faith nor gratitude were in my heart; and now, in my day of trouble, He lends me no helping-hand! I have pursued shadows, and they fly from my grasp. The real—the true—the holy—which I despised, are far, oh! far from me *now!*”

The dreary hours passed on; hours without rest or hope for those who saw that her strength was ebbing fast; and, as the cords of life were loosed, her thoughts became less intent upon herself. She alluded no more to the cruelty of her husband. Solicitude for the child she was leaving, seemed to take possession of her mind.

“There will be none to train him up;—none to redeem his little feet from the same parched dreary desert of worldliness which has made me what I am!” murmured the dying woman.

“Yes—yes” — interposed the faithful Maria, bending over her, and taking soothingly into her own, the burning, trembling hands of the invalid. “Those who bear his name will love, and cherish, and watch over him, for his unhappy father’s sake.”

“God be thanked that you are here!” faltered the sinking woman, instantly recognizing the gentle voice of Maria, so indicative of her gentle nature. “Let the helpless little creature be brought this moment, that I may solemnly entrust him to your care! And should it ever be given him to see his father’s face, tell him, Maria — tell the cousin of whom you have been the truest friend, that in my last moments I forgave him—forgave him as I trust to be forgiven—because conscious (oh! be it not too late!) of my unworthiness of pardon or peace. And plead with him—plead earnestly, Maria—as none have ever pleaded with myself—that he be not wholly engrossed by the things of this world! Let not *his* dying bed, like mine, be one of anguish and remorse.”

Tenderer words proceeded from her lips, and tenderer thoughts melted in her heart, when a moment afterwards,

the babe was brought at her command, and placed for the first and last time in her arms, to be baptized in the tears of a dying mother, and consecrated to GOD by lips already convulsed by the approach of death.

Mrs. Barrington, utterly overcome, and lying in a fainting state in the adjoining room, was spared the terrors of a death-bed to which the son whose faults of nature she had long recognised as the fruit of her pernicious indulgence, had contributed so cruel a share. But before Maria received back into her arms, from those of its expiring mother, the babe towards whom she was fervently engaging herself to supply a mother's place, two other persons had glided through the glimmering light into the room, and fallen on their knees in silence by the bed-side,—dreading to shake the few last sands in the glass, by agitating the feelings of Lady Alicia.

Some instinct of nature, however, apprised her that they were there.

“Thanks, dear brother and sister!” said she, in a somewhat stronger voice, extending her hands to Lord Heriford and Lady Sophia, who had travelled all night, preceding the rest of the family, after receiving the tardy summons of the physician. “You are come to close my eyes! You are come to promise that, to my poor child, you will not be as callous and careless as I, alas! have been to *you*. The life and prosperity, with which I have dealt so unworthily, are taken from me, my poor Sophy. You sometimes warned me, and I scoffed at your warnings: but spare them, oh! spare them not to my son! For his father's sake, the kind friend by your side has adopted him as her own. Maria,—dearest brother!—give me your hands, and promise me to unite for ever in this sacred trust. Worthy as you are of each other, I should die content, if comforted by the certainty that your union secured happiness to each other and a lasting home to my orphan boy!”

The fervour with which the hands thus united, and not withdrawn by Maria, were pressed to her lips, was the last effort of expiring nature. Another moment, and nothing was heard in that darkened chamber but the wail of a feeble infant, and the stifled sobs of the mourners for the dead!

* * * * *

More than a year has elapsed since the afflicting scene,

which the world, so apt to estimate the morality of events by their results, regarded as a frightful aggravation of the guilt of Charles Barrington and the reckless partner of his flight. When the news of Lady Alicia's death transpired, their case was decided by the wisdom of the clubs to be the most infamous on record; the treachery of Eleanor towards her cousin, and the ingratitude of Barrington towards the patrician family which had stooped to receive him into its arms, being duly thrown into the balance.

Into the remoter origin of the misconduct of both, no one, of course, was at the pains to inquire; nor, as the adopted son of the new Marquis and Marchioness of Heriford is tolerably secure from the evil influences of the same worldly and superficial education, is it desirable, perhaps, that the evil should be traced too accurately to its source.

Even Maria, when adverting to the future destinies of little Charles with the husband to whom, though tardily, she has warmly and strongly attached herself, abstains, by tacit consent with her lord, from all allusion to the past. But not even the prospect of a child of her own has, in the slightest degree, diminished her maternal devotion to the lovely boy so solemnly bequeathed to her care; in whom poor Mrs. Barrington, while fondly sharing the duties of her niece, already traces, though more in grief than triumph, the features of her absent son.

From Italy, where the fugitives have established themselves, enjoying the sort of semi-distinction which, in the cities of the continent least frequented by English people, is secured by the lavish expenditure of a handsome income, brief and peevish letters occasionally reach Easton Hoo. The graceless Charles invariably describes himself as an exile, pining after the domestic comfort of his native country,—as though his banishment and the disgrace of his companion were not the work of their own reckless profligacy. The repentance of both, though unavowed, is manifest in the unceasing murmurs of his discontent! It is clear that neither of them have strength of mind to endure the slights occasionally shown them by their fellow-countrymen on their travels.

To his father, rather than his gentle mother, are those letters usually addressed. A gradual degeneration of

nature is begetting some sympathy between him and that sorry parent, who, on learning the act of madness into which Charles had suffered himself to be betrayed, was chiefly solicitous concerning the amount of damages likely to be entailed on his delinquency by the rigour of the law; and who, on learning that Lord Mortayne did not intend to prosecute, and that the guilty Eleanor retained the enjoyment of her income, readily reconciled himself to the decease of Lady Alicia, whom he had always detested as a useless fine lady,—more particularly since her ladyship's death-bed wisdom secured him against being encumbered with the rearing of his little grandson.

“I can see the child whenever I choose to go and spend a day or two at Greensells!” was his reply to Sir Hildebrand and Lady Chalkney's expressions of amazement that he should not have claimed the care of the only child of his only son. “As to my wife, she is oftener with Lady Heriford than at home.”

The name of Lady Heriford sealed their lips! For though the selfish curmudgeon of the Hoo has become more than ever an object of contempt to his country neighbours, they are compelled to some forbearance towards the near kinsman of that young and lovely marchioness, who imparts as much lustre to her private station, as her lord to the eminent political position he has lately assumed in the country.

Even grandmama admits without reserve that not a fault is to be found with either, and that the administration of the last representatives of the family has been improved upon by the present; and as soon as her lady daughter shall have sufficiently recovered her vexation at the improvident marriages of Lady Blanche Nebwell and Lady Mary Rubric, she will probably see cause to echo the verdict of the shrewd old dowager. The Vicary Arables, the Ironsides, and a few other notables of the county, indeed, are a little surprised to find no public days announced at Greensells. But they still trust that the eclipse of their robes of lilac satin and pink gauze may not be permanent; and that the roar of county hospitality will recommence, as soon as the achievement of the late marquis is taken down, and the birth of a son and heir commemorated at the fine old seat.

Of Lord Mortayne, it is difficult and painful to write. The fashionable world asserts him to be once more a wanderer in the East. But those to whom the happiness of Morty is too dear to admit of trusting to rumour on such a point are aware that, for the last twelve months, he has never quitted the secluded precincts of the Manor. His friend, Sir John Hildyard, the only person admitted as a guest, describes him as broken in health and decrepit in appearance—with the untimely snows of sorrow sprinkled on his head! But to his *confidence*, not even Hildyard has been admitted. On one occasion, when Sir John was inadvertently betrayed into invectives against the perversity of nature betrayed by one so young, so lovely, so seemingly innocent as Eleanor Maitland, a restraining hand was laid upon his arm by Morty; and the grave adjuration of

“Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all!”

silenced the words upon his lips.

By a strange chance, it happened that, on Lord Mortayne's return from his yachting expedition, when, on the strength of the hints supplied by his servants, he instantly rushed to Arlington Street for an explanation of his wife's absence, the person by whom his visit was received was—Lady Sophia de Capell!

Apprehensive that, in the exasperation of mind to be apprehended from a husband so injured, he might expose to the utmost publicity the extent of his wrongs, Lady Sophia, though overcome by grief and consternation, resolved to see and to entreat him.

“Grievously as you are suffering, dear Lord Mortayne,” pleaded the amiable woman whose destinies he had so wantonly marred, “believe me, you are not the *greatest* sufferer. My poor sister is lying yonder, in her coffin! Take pity on *her*—take pity on *us*; and do not, I beseech you, pursue with too unrelenting a virulence those whose disgrace must recoil, alas! upon yourself and upon us all!”

It was not difficult to satisfy one in whom forbearance was a distinguishing virtue, that his object was to *spare* rather than to *avenge*. He spoke of Eleanor with pity. He took upon himself the larger share of blame. It was not

necessary to particularize the terrible *motives* of his mercy : but a few stringent words sufficed to reassure the discerning Lady Sophia—so mild, so dignified in her sisterly sorrow—that he had no thought of appealing to the tribunals of the land, or provoking newspaper exposure.

Already his resolve was taken, to bear his humiliation in silence, as meted out by Justice Divine.

Among those who have profited least by the catastrophe in the De Capell family, is Lord Henry, who is still waiting, and providentially enough will probably have long to wait, for his accession to the Kilsythe barony and estates. For though the amount of his *post obits* will be considerably increased by the suspense, his experience will be proportionably augmented. In the decline and fall of the popular Morty, he has witnessed a striking example of the career of a mere man of the world,—shrivelled into premature old age,—with health, and heart, and fortune hopelessly broken by a too lawless indulgence in the pleasures of fashionable life.

“Had he married Sophy de Capell, what a first-rate fellow would he have turned out!” exclaimed Bowbridge, one day at White’s, to Sir Alan Harkesley, when, in a fit of disgust at the slang and antics of Lord Newbury, and the pompous priggism of the newly-created Sir Meshech Bernardo, he was tempted to revert to Morty as “the noblest Roman of them all.”

“Ay, ay! We should all turn out wonderful fine things, if something had happened which was never likely to happen!” retorted Newbury, flippantly breaking into the conversation. “But don’t take to preaching on an empty claret butt, my dear Bowbridge, in the midst of the jaunts and jollities of the London season; with the Derby week before us, and the birthday close behind! And, by the way, Bow, guess who was the beauty of the said birthday? The Durham bride,—the rustic Marchioness of Heriford!”

“Who, *entre nous*, never approached the critical angle of Hyde-park-corner,” retorted Harkesley, “till she turned it in her bridal chariot, under the safe convoy of our friend Clan!”

“So much the better for them both!” rejoined Sir John Hildyard, raising his eyes a moment from his newspaper.

“The best possible conscience-keeper for a woman is her lord and master; and had I a daughter——”

“Hear! hear! hear! hear!” interrupted Lords Bowbridge and Newbury, amid shouts of laughter from Sir Alan Harkesley and the rest.

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