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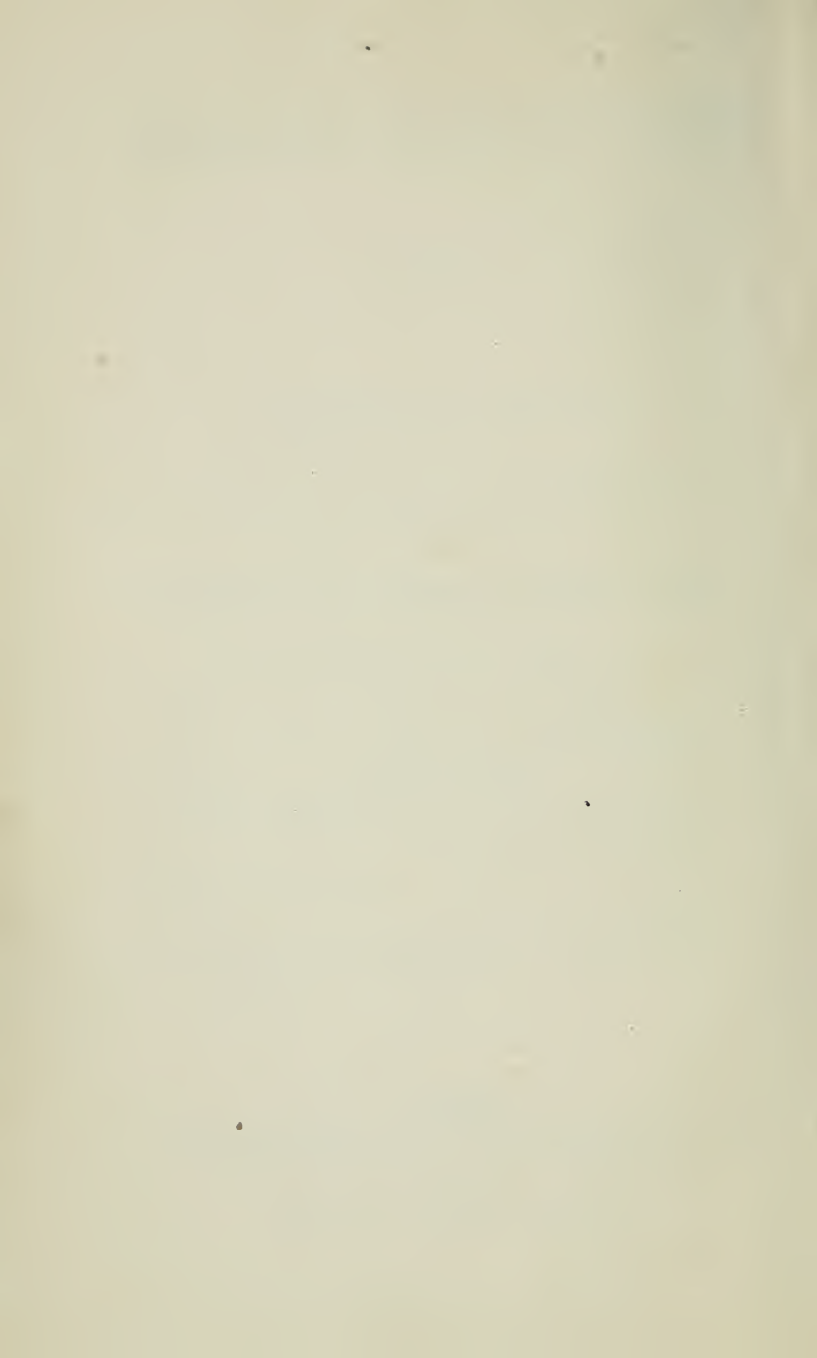
VOL. II.

London:

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1869.

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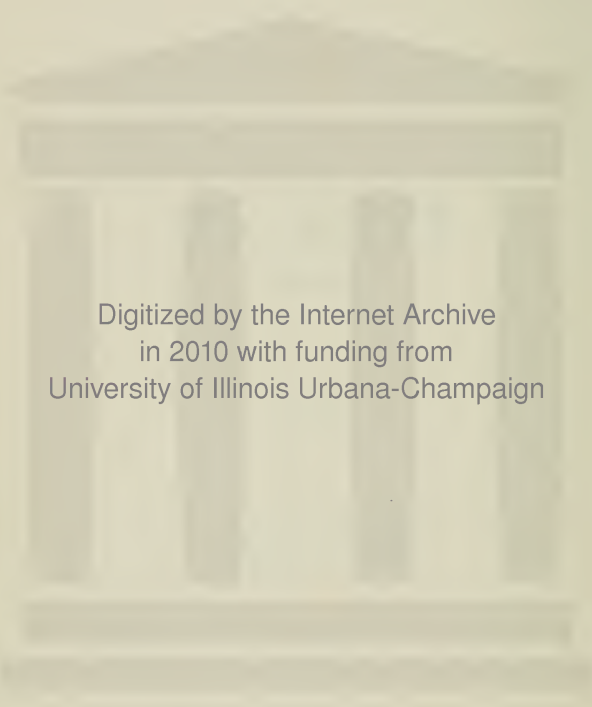
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BOOK II.

(Continued.)



NETTINE.



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PHILIP VAUGHAN'S MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER THE WEDDING.

MISS DATCHET'S good star, there is no doubt, controlled the visit of the dragoon to his friends, so far at least as its duration was concerned. As long as his return to Bath might have embarrassed her, it was retarded; in the first moment she could unreservedly desire it, it was accorded to her. About a quarter past two o'clock on the day succeeding that of Nettine's wedding, Caroline, look-

ing up from a glove she was mending near the drawing-room window, at the approaching footfall of a horse, beheld the gallant officer, completely accoutred for conquest if not for war, in the act of riding past the gate. There was not a second for preparation or for doubt. His face was turned full to the window; and his smile, his auburn whisker, his yellow glove, his shining boot, the satin coat of his bright bay mare, the whole faultless get up, in short, of both animal and man flashed upon her like the sun. He lifted his hat, too, and in doing so, and in slowly replacing it, left his eyes, so to speak, in her heart. She flew to her room. As to oversetting the water jug, the contents of which, being unattended to, might very probably descend through the ceiling of the apartment below,—that was Marianne's or Mrs. Arnold's affair. You will believe without difficulty that her toilette was not a protracted one. It might be hoped, indeed, that eyes so bright and a tint so carmine might compensate even in the

gaze of an inflexible taste, for ill-tied bonnet strings. As it was, Rolleston had parted from his steed and reached the place of *rendezvous* before her.

Their meeting was radiant, demonstrative; yet—ah! must there always be a draw back?—his first speech, the last sentence of his first speech, jarred upon her.

“How more than well you look! But no wonder! I find all the world talking of the marriage. How famously you managed it!”

Caroline supposed—she said—it was a good deal talked about.

“Rayther. You knew nothing of it, I suppose, when I went away?”

“Oh no! nothing.”

“I hope you would have asked me if I had been here. I almost think I ought to have had an invitation sent to me. What a sensible young lady your cousin must be!”

“Ye—es.”

“Why, they say old Templar has five or six thousand a year, and she will be in all the

society. We shall be waltzing together, Carry—you and I, I mean; that is if you intend to patronise me. I shall expect such beautiful bows from you when I take off my hat in passing Mrs. Templar's carriage. And in the meantime, now that we have reached the discreet cover of these bushes, I mean to have exactly as many kisses as I have been weeks absent."

It is not in my power to say whether he carried out his intentions; but I think it probable he did. Here we quit the pair. However acceptable to Miss Datchet an exact repetition of a former walk, it might not be equally so to the reader. Of this walk, then, I will only say further that Caroline returned from it at a rather later hour than usual, and with an aspect so radiant that Mrs. Arnold, whose reserve on the matter recent events in the family had a little broken down, observed that she "supposed Captain Rolleston had come back."

"He has, mamma."

“And what has he got to say for himself?”

“For himself?”

“What does he think of Nettine's marriage?”

“Oh! he is delighted.”

“You keep your mouth shut very close, Caroline. Has he said nothing on his own account?”

“Not anything—exactly.”

“‘Not anything—exactly,’ is nothing.”

“Not quite, mamma!” and Caroline turned a crimson face to the window.

“I wouldn't let it go on much longer for all that,” said Mrs. Arnold. “I am getting not to like it, I can tell you. There's been time for him to make up his mind. If he has anything to say, let him say it; and if not—”

“Mamma, it will be all right.”

“You are not a simpleton,—you ought to know. But it has gone on long enough. Now mind what I say,—it has gone on long

enough. You know what they are beginning to hint about Anastasia,—that Sir Walter Wing has never had such a thought in his head.”

“Mamma, it will be all right!” Caroline repeated ; in a low voice, however, and with eyes averted from her mother, who, but half satisfied, took up her sewing.

The dear lady was not at her best. The afternoon of the previous day having brought her no visitors, she had sallied forth on this one designedly to air her new consequence, and receive the congratulations of her friends. These had disappointed her ; they had not been very liberally or cordially tendered. A reserve and a different sort of surprise from that she had expected, had characterised them. Her grander acquaintances had bowed to her, she thought, coldly ; and she had been distinctly cut by no less a personage than the Lady Anne Wing. If, upon self-examination, she was constrained to endorse the verdict of disapproval which she was a person to feel

deeply, we have the more need to pity her. Any way, she had begun to see (begun even at the moment in which Caroline was performing imaginary waltzes with the dragoon officer) that the social position of her daughter and herself would be little improved by the marriage that had taken place in the family: nay, that they might be credited with clever and successful manœuvring, and the Rollestons of the gay world set on their guard against a house hitherto unconsidered in such a world, or considered there only with respect.

You will conceive that an early letter from the bride would be looked for in Upper Camden Place, and that the non-arrival of such a letter would be productive of further disappointment and uneasiness. The fourth day after the wedding was drawing to a close, Caroline had not again seen Rolleston, and the spirits of neither mother nor daughter were high. The Professor's pianoforte was silent, for he had an evening engagement;

and in the midst of the roll of carriages and wheel chairs that indicated a party in the fashionable crescent so little remote, the postman's evening knock commenced to be heard.

"How about foreign letters, mamma?" Miss Datchet asked, rising up from a recumbent attitude on the same crimson moreen sofa we have already more than once mentioned. "They may, perhaps, come in the evening."

"I don't know, I am sure."

Very likely they *did* come in the evening; but the postman went past Mr. Arnold's gate, and the younger lady returned to her former position, and the elder one inflexibly plied her needle and thread in silence. At the same time a woman who had been scanning the numbers over the doors of the houses in Camden Crescent paused to consider the appearance of that one at which a party was beginning to assemble. The open door revealed a hall and staircase brilliantly lighted. Light.

streamed from the basement, from the drawing-room windows, and from those on the second floor,—those of the probable dining-room being the only ones that shutters made dark ; and carriages were always arriving, so that the whole crescent resounded with the double knocks. The woman I have mentioned was unnoticed in such a scene, and when, having, as I have said, for a little while considered the house, she asked a man from whose chair a lady had just entered the hall, and who, with a quick, skilful turn peculiar, I think, to a Bath chairman, had withdrawn his vehicle from the doorway and constrained it to attach itself to the rails of a neighbouring area—when she asked the man if “Mrs. Arnold lived there ?” he replied without even regarding his questioner—

“Mrs. Lowther’s.”

“Is this Upper Camden Place ?”

“Straight on !” he said, and stretched forth his hand in the direction she was to follow.

A black silk gown and a well-to-do shawl

were apparent to the glance he bestowed on her receding figure ; and in addition to these she wore a genteel straw bonnet and a thick lace veil, and hesitated a moment when she found herself quitting the wide, lighted crescent for a dark interval and a narrow pavement, with houses of inferior pretension beyond. The hesitation, however, was but momentary, and she went on, regarding the number on each gate she passed, till she reached that of Mr. Arnold, and made a longer pause. A lamp nearly opposite must have enabled her to read the name and inscription on the brass plate, and in fact, she seemed to do so attentively. Nevertheless, she walked on a little further, in a thoughtful sort of way ; presently turning, and, still thoughtfully, retracing her steps to the gate. Here she again stopped, and after three or four moments extended her hand to the bell handle. She did not ring it, however, but, by another impulse, tried the gate itself, which readily yielded to her touch ; and, opening and closing it with-

out noise, she ascended to the door of the house. All here was dark. She knocked, and a not very clean woman-servant presently responded to the summons.

"Does Mr. Arnold live here?" the visitor asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Is he within?"

"No, he ain't."

"Is Mrs. Arnold?"

"Missis is."

"Can I see her?"

"I'll ask. What's your name?"

"My name is not of consequence,—I am not known to Mrs. Arnold. Be so good as to say I have lately seen Mr. and Mrs. Templar."

At this, the parlour door, which had been a little ajar, was opened from within, and the mistress of the house, with such a smile and curtsy as might have served to receive Miss Mackenzie Browne herself, came forward.

"*Pray* walk in!" she said, but, nevertheless, her smile and manner became something

modified as her eye took in rapidly the details of an appearance that did not quite correspond, she found, with the purity of the voice and accent in which she had been inquired for. She ushered in the visitor, however, and whilst the latter and Caroline, who had risen with eager expectation from the sofa, exchanged salutations, she closed the door.

“You have seen Mrs. Templar?”

“I have. I speak to the mother and”—turning towards Caroline—“the sister of Mrs. Templar?”

“No. Mrs. Templar is Mr. Arnold's niece.”

“I am the person who was engaged by Mrs. Montmorency to accompany Mrs. Templar to Paris.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Arnold said; and her hand fell away from the chair she had twice made a sort of movement to offer—“The maid!”

“The maid.”

“There is nothing the matter?” asked Caroline eagerly. “Nettine—Mrs. Templar—is well?”

"As far as I know, Mrs. Templar is well."

"Sit down, pray!" and Miss Datchet stepped forward and distinctly placed a chair for the stranger. Then she returned to the sofa, and Mrs. Arnold, too, felt herself constrained to be seated.

"Now," said Caroline, "please tell us about her."

"May I first ask," inquired the woman, looking from mother to daughter, "if Mrs. Templar has been brought up in this house?"

It was the turn of mother and daughter to regard each other.

"No!" the former replied. "Not brought up."

"I should have done more properly in asking if she was long under your care?"

"Not very long!" Mrs. Arnold again answered, and this time with increased reserve, and even a displeased and resentful expression of eye.

"I am sorry to say I had not the good fortune to suit Mrs. Templar."

“ Oh!—indeed !”

In the little silence succeeding this marked ejaculation, the visitor raised her lace veil,—partially raised it, so that only the scalloped edge continued to fall over her bonnet, and shade, if it did not soften, the contour of her face. It was a large, thick-complexioned face, the features of which might have been considered handsome by a certain taste, but were without delicacy, while the eyes and heavy eyebrows of almost the Jewish type were found by the blonde young lady to whom they became revealed, more remarkable than engaging.

“ I met Mr. and Mrs. Templar at Paddington, as Mrs. Montmorency had arranged, and accompanied them, that is to say, their luggage, to their hotel. Mrs. Templar expressed no disappointment or disapproval. I assisted her in such alteration of her dress for dinner as she would permit, and made a new arrangement of her hair with which she appeared pleased.”

“You must have been,” said Mrs. Arnold, probably because she thought it requisite to say something, “quite surprised at it—her hair, I mean.”

“Unexampled hair, certainly. After dinner I again waited on her, having heard her withdraw to her room. She then told me she should require no further attendance that evening, nor at night : she was unaccustomed to assistance at the hour of retirement. I made, therefore, when tea and coffee were being served in the *salon* to Mr. Templar and herself, such arrangements as a lady would usually require, and forbore any further intrusion. Nevertheless, it was not till sometime after both had retired for the night that I, too, went to rest.

“At eight o'clock on the following morning I knocked lightly at the door of the sleeping chamber, and the answer returned me in the voice of Mr. Templar was, ‘Who is there?’

“Almost at the same instant, however, the

adjoining dressing-room was opened, and Mrs. Templar, wearing all but the bonnet and Cashmere of the travelling toilette in which I had first seen her, appeared at it. Her face seemed to me of a more extraordinary paleness than on the previous day, and her eyes turned themselves on me with an anger, aversion, and contempt, beyond which I received no notice. Her look and the manner in which she passed through the doorway made me attribute to her an uncontrollable temper. It was necessary, however, for me to justify myself, and for this purpose I followed her as she swiftly traversed the gallery, and entered behind her a room in which breakfast was already laid, and which she crossed in a similar manner, taking up her position at a window at the further end that looked on the street. I know not that she was, in the first, aware of my presence. It seemed not. She stood for some moments—even minutes—with her back to me, looking out ; and when, at

length, she turned and addressed me, her eyes dilated, and gleamed in a manner that suggested the idea of insanity.

“‘What,’ she said, ‘do you stand there for? Go out of the room—go out of the house! I require no maid; I will not have one! Do you hear? I don’t want you. I dismiss you. What is to be paid you?’ And in an excited way she took out a purse and emptied some gold into her hand.

“I declined to receive it, and with a little irritation, which my suspicions as to the state of her mind should have checked (but her look and manner were indescribably offensive), I informed her that I must appeal to Mr. Templar. At the same moment, probably fearing an outbreak, and without much preparation at the hands of his valet, Mr. Templar entered the room.

“‘Pay her!’ said his lady, without an introductory word. ‘She refuses to be paid by me, and I have dismissed her. I do not want a maid.’

“My dear Mrs. Templar—’ the old gentleman began—

“‘Pay her!’ his wife reiterated. ‘I tell you I will not have a maid!’

“‘My dear madam!—I must beg to be heard. Mrs. Templar cannot travel without one.

“‘Then—I will have a stranger. I will *not* have that woman!—I will have a stranger!’

“‘My dear Mrs. Templar, she is a stranger.’

“‘No!’ Mrs. Templar exclaimed, her face all in a sudden flame, as you ladies may no doubt have seen it, with the contradiction ‘I saw her yesterday!’ And she swept across the room, cast herself on a sofa, and burst into a passion of tears.’”

A sort of smile that now appeared on the woman’s unpleasant face altered a little, without much improving, its character.

“Mr. Templar’s morning toilette,” she continued, “was, I have said, incomplete. He was distressed, disconcerted, prevented only perhaps by the novelty of his circumstances.

from expressing mortification and anger. His long dressing-gown trailed behind him on the floor, and more than once while taking short turns in front of the couch on which his lady was indulging so extraordinary a paroxysm, and while always repeating with a wave of the hand towards myself—'This will subside!— This will subside!' his legs would become entangled in the folds, and he presented an appearance which it is difficult to recall and preserve one's gravity."

Her auditors had at least no difficulty in preserving theirs. Mother and daughter regarded each other, and then returned their eyes to the face of the *raconteuse*.

"Probably," the latter continued, "relieved of a part of the excitement by the tears she had shed, Mrs. Templar began to grow aware of the ridicule attaching to so extraordinary a scene ; for suddenly she started from the sofa, nearly overturning her husband by the violence of her movement, and escaped from the room. Mr Templar then seated himself,

wiped with a handkerchief the moisture of agitation from his face, and took out his purse."

"Of course," Mrs. Arnold said, "he paid you your month?"

"Three months,—such had been the arrangement; and he in a manner apologised for the behaviour of his wife. She had not been accustomed to attendance, he informed me; and, naturally, I could not understand it at the time."

"And what, then," questioned Mrs. Arnold, not too ceremoniously, "has brought you to Bath?"

"If you permit me I will explain. At the time I unfortunately agreed with Mrs. Montmorency I declined a situation at Clifton to which I had been highly recommended; and, since my services have been rejected in the one quarter, it behoves me to ascertain if the other remains open to me. I have some reason to hope that my personal application may still obtain the engagement, and am on my

way, therefore, to Clifton. My object in remaining a night at Bath was to see the relatives of Mrs. Templar and request their good word."

"I am afraid," Mrs. Arnold replied, "we can be of little use ——"

"No, I perceive. You will not think me uncivil or unreasonable if I say that I had presumed the family of Mrs. Templar to occupy a different position."

"You were furnished, however," said Mrs. Arnold, "with our address."

"By accident. The old envelope of a letter that had probably fallen through inadvertence into one of the trunks gave me the information I have made use of."

The envelope presented to Mrs. Arnold for her inspection *had* probably fallen into the woman's hands in the manner alleged. Too much discomposed to know quite what she was doing, Mrs. Arnold continued to regard it.

"Will the person," Caroline asked, "take any refreshment, mamma?"

“Nothing whatever, I am greatly obliged to you!” replied ‘the person,’ who had already risen. “It is getting late, and I may find it possible to go on to Bristol to-night. I wish you a good evening.”

“If,” Miss Datchet civilly said, in accompanying the visitor to the door, “you should not obtain the situation you hope for, it is just possible that Mr. Arnold may be able,—he has a large acquaintance, and is sometimes inquired of in matters of the kind.”

“I thank you,” the woman returned. “At any rate, if I should pass through Bath again I will call to acquaint you with my success or otherwise. I thank you very much. Good evening.”

“She has not,” said Mrs. Arnold, averting her eyes from her daughter when the latter returned to the room, “done so badly, since she got a quarter’s wages.”

And Caroline replied “No.” But both knew this was not what they were thinking of.

CHAPTER XII.

A BRIDE.

MR. TEMPLAR had not designed that his wedding visit to Paris should be of very long duration. It presently became apparent to those interested for, or anxious in regard to, the return of himself and his bride, that the furnishing of the house he had taken in the Royal Crescent—I am not sure by the way, he had not bought it—was being carried on with extraordinary vigour; and, in fact, the honeymoon had scarcely expired, and the

Bath "season" was at its full, when the beautiful face of Nettine was seen to look from the windows. Society had in the interval made up its mind as to the course to be pursued. The young singing wife of the rich old *fanatico* was to be petted and fêted. Mr. Arnold—a creature, Society said, all simplicity, and who had probably been as ignorant of the audacious scheming going on within his doors as Society itself—Society would receive with the same respect as heretofore; neither more, it protested, or less. On the devoted heads, however, of the wife and step-daughter of the Professor, affronted Society would pour out its wrath. It would not ask Mrs. Arnold and Caroline even where they had been accustomed to be asked. It would not see them even where they had been accustomed to be seen. It would not have them in any way at any price.

It is true this young singing wife, being rich and beautiful, might perhaps have a will of her own in regard to the reception by her

friends of the persons under whose roof she had resided, who were so nearly connected with herself, who had shown her some kindness, and from whose door she had passed into a lady of fashion and consequence. She might, we say, have intentions of her own in such a matter. We will see; and the sooner the better, lest we attribute to the influence of Society a conduct for which it was in no way responsible.

“My dear Mrs. Templar,” said her husband when, after some promenading and peering about his spacious drawing-room, he had ascertained that Nettine in her silk dinner dress and jewels occupied a corner of one of the costly lounges the newly furnished apartment contained. “My dear Mrs. Templar, can you at all understand how it is possible that your letters have never been received in Upper Camden Place?”

“I could not,” Mrs. Templar replied, “have at all understood it if they had.”

“How!”

“It is quite simple. I have not written any.”

“You have not written any?”

“I have not written any.”

“What do you mean?”

“That I have not written any.”

“Not to your uncle!—Not to his good wife!—Not to your cousin!!

“To none of them.”

“Good God! And *my* compliments!—*my* civilities to persons I respect ——”

The result of Nettine's Parisian visit was a faint shrug of her white shoulders.

“They remain to be offered by you in person.”

“On my soul, Madam!—But this is inconceivable—incomprehensible!—it even appears to me ——”

“That dinner is served,” said Mrs. Templar; and rising from her sofa as the door was thrown open, and gently taking the old gentleman by the arm, she walked him downstairs and to the head of the table, at which

she seated herself for the first time in the manner of a person unconscious of the faintest novelty in the position.

The subject, however, was not at an end; Mr. Templar waited only the withdrawal of the servants to return to the charge.

“You tell me,” he said, and in taking this tone his curled *toupee* had always the appearance of elevating itself a little, “you tell me that you have not written to your uncle, or to his wife, or to his wife’s daughter, since your marriage?”

“I have not,” replied Mrs. Templar, “written since my marriage to any one of the three.”

“Allow me to say, Madam,” observed her lord, and spilled half the wine he intended to pour into his glass upon the table-cloth, “your conduct is in bad taste. What earthly motive you can have had for the omission I inquire not—I care not! No motive can justify it, or excuse it. I am compromised! It

is an omission, madam, in bad taste!—in bad taste, by Heaven!”

I have seen an animal—I have seen a maniac—when about to become dangerous, look as Mrs. Templar looked while her husband spoke. There came a glitter into the eye which she fixed steadily upon him.

“Once for all,” she said—this child, this chit of a Nettine who but the other day was practising her notes and running round the garden in Upper Camden Place, “once for all, understand that I have begun as I mean to go on;—that I will not write to my uncle, or my uncle’s wife, or my uncle’s wife’s daughter; that I will not go to their house; that I will receive *him* in mine; but that I will not receive *them*, either now or ever!”

“By my soul, Madam! by my soul!” the old Benedict exclaimed, and started up from the table, and began walking to and fro, turning each time so sharply that one had no difficulty in comprehending how easily he would have entangled his legs in a long, flow-

ing dressing gown. "This is a little too extraordinary!—you improve, you progress—allow me to remind you—in fact, you have not now to practice for the stage. By my soul!"

Nettine followed him with her angry eyes in which, however, the anger soon began to fade, and to be replaced by amusement,—a somewhat bitter, mocking sort of amusement, it is true, but which gradually became more genuine merriment, and culminated in a ringing fit of laughter. "By my soul; by my soul!" Mr. Templar always exclaimed; and then, "By my God!" but Nettine laughed more and more. She laughed till the tears overflowed her eyes; and these were still wet and glittering when she ascended the stairs, and threw herself into a corner of one of the superb damask and gilt couches of her drawing-room.

Ultimately she yielded in some little measure to the wishes of her husband; or, more probably, was touched and softened by the

simple, unsuspecting warmth of the Professor's congratulations in the little early visit that he made Mr. Templar and herself. She consented to be "at home" to Mrs. Arnold and Caroline. She gave a hand coldly to the elder lady, and permitted the younger one to kiss her cheek. She even told the latter she should be "glad to see her again," and for some unexpressed reason Mrs. Arnold and her daughter forbore to complain to the Professor, or even to each other, of the reception that had been accorded to them.

It did not seem that Nettine would become extremely popular in the society that had desired to entitle itself to her gratitude, and that was presently found putting forth its best for her amusement. She had duly appeared at the houses of Miss Mackenzie Browne and three or four others of her husband's friends, and, in the first instance, her beauty had charmed all eyes. Subsequently it had been considered, however, that she had

little to say for herself, that she was very ready to retire from a company at the early hour prescribed to her husband, and that she received with indifference, not to say coldness, the attentions offered her. For ignorance of the world society had of course prepared itself; but it did not find her very intelligent; it did not find her grateful; it did not find her amusable. And these, though time and a further acquaintance with the code of good manners might make them cease to appear, were held to be serious defects. She was beautiful, and she sang charmingly—this was all. A few persons considered her indifference to gaiety and to the compliments of society, better than a taste in the opposite extreme; but these persons were, as I have just said, few,—and not those most influential in society.

And in the meantime this indisputably beautiful and fortunate Mrs. Templar was commencing to lead, evidently by her own fault, a very unsatisfactory and even *triste*

life in her splendid home. Nothing could be more difficult than to attempt at this moment to account to the reader for a languor so unreasonable. Mr. Templar had astonished others, and perhaps also himself, by his lavish outlay on the surroundings of his bride. Her private apartments might have served a Princess; her public ones were, at least, the handsomest she had yet seen. She had a carriage—have I already said so?—newer and as elegant as that of Mrs. Meredith. She had a French maid, whose excellence could only be approached by the Mademoiselle Marie of the Lady Anne Wing. She had a well arranged establishment that left her no household duty to perform. She had always a toilette on which, now that I have mentioned so lavish a husband and so accomplished a waiting-woman, I need not dilate. She had a table which she had not arrived at an age to appreciate. She had a piano the finest that could be bought for money. She had a conservatory, a lap-dog, and all the

new novels. Yet the lustrous eyes that we have seen wander so happily round the dingy little ceiling in Upper Camden Place seemed utterly unobservant of flowers and furniture, music and books ; and would fix themselves even for hours on the wide landscape beyond the spotless windows of her drawing-room, without really beholding—as a moderately observant person might discover—a single yard of the same. The one thing she seemed to care for was her beautiful new carriage. In this she usually, almost invariably, passed the portion of the afternoon between two or three and five or six o'clock ; and it was in this that her youth, solitude, and the beauty of her eyes, attracted an attention of which she appeared absolutely unconscious.

It was on the afternoon of a day preceding that of a large private ball to be given at the Assembly Rooms, that Mr. Templar informed his wife he had asked an old friend to dine. Nettine was not, as a rule, much interested in the old friends of her husband ; but rising,

when the appointed hour came, to curtsy to the personage who had entered her drawing-room with Mr. Templar, she found herself face to face with Colonel Montresor.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE.

THAT personage was charmed with Mrs. Templar, and unable to understand the condemnation of her, on the part of society, of which the reader has, and of which he had, already heard. His own verdict was quite an opposite one. He had rarely, he thought, beheld a young, lovely lady so desirous to please, or possessed of greater capabilities, wanting only perfect development, of pleasing. He believed that society had been unjust to

her. He suspected it had been insincere in its reception of her. He even imagined it might be its intention to crush her. And you will easily comprehend how warmly such belief, such suspicion, would interest him for a creature so young, and in many respects, notwithstanding the wealth and position of her husband, so helpless. She was going, he had found, on the following night without any great expectation of pleasure to the ball of which society was thinking and talking so extensively, and he had assured her that in the way of increasing its amusement to her all the little in his power would be at her service. "You would be doing *me*," Mr. Templar had said, "a great service if you would *take* Mrs. Templar to the ball." And Montresor, who had been the sole *chaperon* of his own daughter on many a similar occasion, accepted the care offered him of a girl who looked even younger than Lady Douglas Arden, without difficulty or a doubt.

On entering her drawing-room at the ap-

pointed hour, he found her seated at the piano,—not singing, not playing, but seated there. On the preceding evening she had said to him—

“Our house is dull,—how can I amuse you? May I sing to you?” and his pleasure in her singing had been great.

It was perhaps the recollection of this that had carried her again to the piano. Montresor, however, unacquainted with the peculiarity of her complexion, found her looking even paler than on the former night, and led her straight to a sofa.

“You must not tire yourself,” he said. “Do not mind me. Drink your coffee quietly; and make no effort till effort is necessary.”

Then, Mr. Templar having retired, he took a book from the table, and read till the carriage was announced. When it was, he closed the volume.

“Are you often,” he said, yet even in speaking began to find that he had rarely

beheld anything so beautiful, so like an Idea, as this very paleness was rendering her; "are you often so pale?"

"Yes!—when other persons would get a colour."

"In that case, let us go at once."

It is not my intention to say much more of the ball than that it was a very brilliant one, and that the appearance of Mrs. Templar was an indisputable success. Her waltzing was discovered to be exquisite. This will not surprise you who have heard of those untaught and spontaneous gyrations of hers in the little parlour of Upper Camden Place; but it took Society a little by surprise. Introduced to her by Montresor, her partners were, you may be sure, the best, so to speak, that were to be had; and by the time the supper hour had arrived, and a certain supercilious young man of rank and fashion, brought by people living in the neighbourhood, had pronounced her beauty ravishing, her waltzing divine, and her silence a thing to be imitated, Society

had made up its mind to admire and dislike her. It had even permitted itself to turn invidious eyes from Montresor himself (to whom it had never yet attributed a flirtation) in the direction of the radiant face—radiant in its peculiar way—seen so often at intervals throughout the evening near his shoulder.

“Why,” he asked her during one of these intervals, “did you tell me that you did not like balls?”

“I meant parties. This is my first ball.”

“Parties, then—society?”

“I said the truth. I have not liked it till to-night.”

“But you will in future?”

“In future, yes.”

“And now you must have some supper. You have deserved some. You did not pause once during the last waltz.”

When, about four o'clock, he had placed her in her carriage and returned through the crowd that filled the space between it and the doorway of the Assembly rooms, she threw

herself back in a corner almost before the wheels began to move. Not because she was tired, but because of the reverse. Her heart and brain, roused into activity by the stimulant the last six hours had applied to them, were asserting themselves for the first time, and, in their turn, causing every pulse of her young, strong, passionate being to throb with a transcending happiness of which she had never dreamed it to be capable. That night was to her the morning—the rosy, fragrant morning—of a new, wonderful joy, to which she opposed no obstacle. Many, even as young as herself, were returning weary from the *fête* to their own homes, needing the refreshment, even if they were not desiring the oblivion, of sleep. But Nettine, I think, resembled in that moment the young Bacchante of a festival who has just taken her place at the board, flashes a smile round her, and carries the cup placed in her hand straight to her lips. She did not say “This is Love!” yet every conscious part of her was contribu-

ting to a melody of which the *refrain* was that marvellous word.

With a pleasure in her own house quite new to her, Mrs. Templar ascended its staircase. The chandelier had been relighted, and a fire kept burning in one of the two drawing-rooms; and to Nettine, on entering, the apartment was full, as with a tint or a perfume, of the charm that Montresor's presence there had left. "Desire Pauline to come to me in ten minutes!" she said, and waited but the closing of the door by the servant to turn her eyes on a glass that occupied the space opposite to her from window to window, and from ceiling to floor. I have omitted to relate a little incident of the ball. It was after Nettine's first dance that Montresor, in leading her through the rooms, had paused, and with a smile turned his regards on a reflection in such another glass of a face so beautiful that his companion did not in the first half-second recognise it for her own. She was now reproducing that moment, and

gazing as then on Montresor, whose eyes had first taught her that she was beautiful, and taught her, too, the value of beauty. Involuntarily, as she looked again on the eyes and smile that had taught her this, she clasped lightly the wrist that had rested on his arm, in the manner he had done when constraining her to pause. Then she threw herself on a sofa and gave herself up—I must not say to remembrance—I must not say to reflection—I must not say to expectation ; but to a delicious sensation, the elementary matter of which she no more perceived than does the bather that of the summer waves which enfold and delight his form.

“Madame will retire ?”

The voice was that of Pauline. It was a cruel interruption, and she—not Pauline, but Pauline’s mistress—started with flashing eyes from the couch.

“Madame will *not* retire. You may do so : and in future, remember—*souviens-toi*—you are not to sit up.”

CHAPTER XIV.

JEALOUSY.

IT is not, I think, often that in the society of the beloved one, or even while the light left by his society is upon and around us, we say for the first time, "This is love." It is in his absence, and when that ineffable light has given place to the "darkness visible" of the ordinary world, that we make the discovery. Love is conceived in pleasure, but probably in nine cases out of ten it is born in pain ; and

not unfrequently Jealousy is the presiding matron at the birth.

It was so with the love of Nettine. Montresor could not dine every day at her table, or take her to all the balls she now began to attend, though he did much to render these agreeable to her. At one of them—a public and not very brilliant or well attended one—he quitted her to join the party of Mrs. Meredith at the opposite side of the room. Unhappily, he had not been long talking to that lady before the handsome Agatha was brought back by a partner—our acquaintance Rolleston, as I think—and Colonel Montresor having shaken hands with her, and found her a place, reseated himself this time between the mother and the girl, and turned to address the latter. It was something in his manner of doing this—a manner too nearly, perhaps, resembling his manner to herself—that for the first time, and suddenly, roused another passion hitherto dormant in the heart of Nettine.

So distinct was the pain that she had nearly put her hand to her side. And the room darkened—all but one part of it, the light of which was painful and caused her to avert her eyes; and the music changed into another key, and took the minor tones of such an overture as we have all heard, in a theatre, prelude the entrance of something evil; and the floor began to undulate and break up at her feet, and the opposite wall, between which and herself the dancers were but thinly scattered, to resemble the large sheet on which the magnified figures thrown from a magic lantern are made to pass to and fro. Whiter and whiter grew her lips, and I know not what might have happened had not the voice of Montresor himself put a limit to her suffering.

“Mrs. Templar,” it said, “do you feel well? You do not look so.”

“No—I am ill.”

“Are you able to cross the floor with my arm to the cloak-room or the card-room?”

Nettine rose instantly, a sensation in her

throat warning her to lose no time in gaining one of those refuges. I know not whether from him or from her came the impulse that directed their steps to the last-named apartment, on entering which Montresor gave a rapid glance to either side of him. The card-tables at the right-hand end of the room were unoccupied. Turning, then, to the right, he conducted his companion to a seat immediately behind half of the red cloth door that opened inwards and constituted a corner in which she no sooner found herself than large tears began to roll over her face.

The position, which might at any time attract notice, and even occasion unpleasant comment, would have been very embarrassing to many men. Not so, where there was real suffering, to Montresor. Nettine had never relinquished his arm, and he held it closely to his side, and even clasped tightly the hand that rested on his wrist.

“ You are suffering terribly !” he said, when a few moments had passed.

“I was : but I am better.”

“Are you accustomed to this sort of attack ?”

“No.”

“You must see Dr. W—— in the morning. Did you find the ball-room hot ?”

“I think,” she faltered, “it was the—the light.”

“Then the comparative darkness of this room will refresh you. Shall I get you a glass of water ?”

Nettine shook her head.

“Or wine ?”

“No, I think not. When you leave me—when you return to the ball-room—I will go home.”

“I do not think,” he replied, “that I shall find much more amusement in the ball-room to-night. I shall be more anxious to be sure that you have recovered completely.”

Nevertheless, when he had sent for Mrs. Templar's carriage and handed her into it, he did return to the ball-room. Alas ! those ball-rooms ! When we are shown the

scene of some sad accident—for instance, a coal pit in which two hundred persons have ceased instantaneously to live—we approach the spot with bated breath and fearful eye; and it is something in such a manner that I have found myself looking up to the large windows and dark stone walls of the very room of which I have been writing. How many have died within that room worse than bodily death in the very midst of us! How many have quitted it knowing that the whole world must be for them henceforth their living tomb, or, more deplorable still, the hell in which they will inflict on others the disappointment that has been recklessly, or vindictively, or—and this perhaps still more often—unconsciously inflicted upon them! As for Nettine, the first more wholesome paroxysm of her tears being ended and the softening influence of Montresor withdrawn, she reached her own house in a state of such pain, amazement, and rage, as only a vigorous and undisciplined heart like hers could have

supplied. Loudly locking the door behind the back of the servant who had ascended the stairs to open it for her, she crossed swiftly the principal drawing-room, and—crushing and destroying in the act the clouds of tulle and garlands of flowers of her ball dress—threw herself amid the cushions of a couch drawn near to the brightly burning fire.

It was in the larger apartment that the chandelier had been lighted for her return, and as many as half-a-dozen looking-glasses reflected her as she sat; her face white, not with the clear, brilliant whiteness peculiar to her best looks, but white like the faces of other persons who suffer, large dark rims round her eyes, and in the eyes themselves an angry light, an expression at once fierce and piteous, like that of some animal in the claws and the fangs that are rending it.

Once only before had she been in a state approaching to this. We have heard of it.

For that, outraged modesty had been responsible. But now, to-night, she comprehended a crueller outrage; that a pearl of great price had been thrown away like a glass bead, and the happiness of a life—a warm, yearning, passionate, aspiring life, that had now fully learned what life might be—sold, as one phrases it, for a song.

Unquestionably the most awful moment of youth is that in which it closes the page that presents the ineffable heart picture of the impossible, and passes on to contemplation of the possible. Better a thousand times that it continued to gaze, even through unavailing tears, upon the first for ever! It was such a moment that Nettine reached to-night.

Montresor, as the object of a sacred love, a pure devotedness, a tender reverence; as the companion of every hour, the director of every action, the sharer of every thought; as the care at once and idol of her life; such a Montresor was on the page she closed. On

the one she opened, was Montresor degraded into the object of a forbidden passion, defying the eye of God and withheld from the eye of man.

CHAPTER XV.

MISS COLLINS "OF THE THEATRE."

I HAVE somewhere said that the ball-room experiences of young ladies differ widely. The evening that revealed to Mrs. Templar a future she should have refused to contemplate, had presented to the more fortunate Miss Meredith the one—I mean the future—she most coveted. On the day after this little brilliant ball, of which I have been writing, it became known that the beautiful Agatha was engaged to Sir Walter Wing, and to the particular friends of the Merediths, that the de-

claration of the baronet had been made in the course of the above mentioned festivity.

This was the sort of little gossip Mr. Templar liked, and which his lady heard with an indifference that invariably annoyed him.

"You seem to have no interest in these things," he said, peevishly, and turned to a book on one of the drawing-room tables.

"I have none!" she replied.

Her *insouciance* was in no great degree diminished when, a few days after, the old gentleman was the bearer of a second bit of news, still, as I lately heard a foreign lady phrase it, "in the marriage line."

"Had you any idea," Mr. Templar asked, and as if he had been about to speak of the most incredible thing in the world; a tone peculiar to his choicest scandals, and the first accent of which always roused antagonism in Nettine; "had you any idea that your cousin was making assignations with Captain Rolleston, and taking walks to Charlcombe?"

"I had not!" Nettine replied, after a

momentary pause, not of hesitation, however.

“Is such a thing possible?”

“Perfectly so.”

“Do you mean that you believe it?”

“I believe it.”

“I am sorry to hear you say so!” the old man answered in his driest voice. “Captain Rolleston is reported to have left Bath in the society of Miss Collins, of the Theatre, and there are rumours of a marriage at Bristol. He must be a consummate scoundrel! if, that is to say, he has been—ahem!—carrying on an intrigue.”

“They will be coming back here, I suppose,” said Mrs. Templar.

“I should imagine not,” replied her lord, and with a grin, and a shake of the head, and a wave of the hand, peculiarly his own; a grin, and a shake, and a wave that, talking of theatres, would have told upon the stage. You might have thought he had married the daughter of a duke.

“And why,” asked the young lady who had not been a duke’s daughter, “should you imagine not?”

“I do not advise them to try it.”

“Now I do. I think it is the sort of thing to suit Miss Collins of the theatre. They might take the house next door.”

There is a love that enlarges the heart’s sympathies and charities, and makes it tender and pitiful of others; and there is a love that closes it to all but the object beloved. Such a love as this was Nettine’s, while Caroline’s was of the character first mentioned; and when the young person from Upper Camden Place, with a sweet, womanly faith in the womanliness of her cousin, herself brought her great disappointment, and the healthy desire to speak of it, to the Crescent, she found herself heard with coldness and even with a sort of stupidity by Nettine. Had she arrived to declare an ill-requited passion for Montresor, Nettine would have understood her, would even, I think, have felt sorry for

her; but for a passion, the object of which was not Montresor—nay, was a person so much in very many respects the opposite of Montresor—Nettine had neither pity nor understanding.

“Since you love him so,” she said, in the course of the interview, “I cannot comprehend how you let it happen.”

“Let it happen!”

“Yes; how you let it happen.”

“I knew nothing about Anastasia. She was meeting him, I now hear, continually in the park; but I was ignorant of it. There was Sir Walter Wing, you know.”

“Who is to marry Miss Meredith. But if you had known?”

“As you say, I do not see how I could have prevented it.”

“As I did not say. Did Captain Rolleston know how much you loved him?”

“Oh! yes; at least, I think so.”

“You ‘think’ so! Will you have a glass of wine or anything?”

"No, thank you; oh! no. And I see your carriage at the door."

"I am in no hurry. There are some sponge cakes. I am in no hurry."

"Then I think I will have a sponge cake. Do you know, since I have heard this news I have not been able to swallow food, hardly."

"You like sponge cakes, however. Now, in your place I think I should drink half that bottle of wine—perhaps the whole."

"That bottle of wine! Isn't it strong wine?"

"Yes."

"Then it would make me tipsy."

"In your place I think I should prefer to be tipsy."

"I do not fancy," said Caroline, with a sad little smile, "that would much mend matters."

"What," Nettine presently asked, "do you mean to do?"

"To do?"

"Yes, to do."

Caroline's lip quivered, and she turned to the window.

"To pray for patience, and that he may have all the happiness he has not quite deserved."

"In that case I cannot help you."

"No, neither you nor any person. But, Nettine, I have so prayed for another thing; and the worst of it all is the temptation to doubt whether our prayers are heard."

"Is that the worst of it?"

"It should be; nay it is. For if— Oh, Nettine! if only this one earnest prayer of my heart could have been answered, I think, through all my after life—through good and ill, if indeed there could have been any ill—through *everything*—my faith would have been as the faith of an apostle. Yet," faltered the young girl, "we say 'Thy will be done!'"

"Yes," replied Nettine "we *say* it. Good bye!"

Then she presented her ivory cheek to

Caroline, the pressure of whose lips left a mark on it for minutes. Caroline was not *exigente*. She mistook much of her own warmth of feeling for warmth of feeling on the part of Nettine, and, in quitting the latter, was as much persuaded of her kindness as if Nettine had bedewed her face with tears, carried her off—as she easily might have done, in her beautiful carriage—to breathe the fresh, pure, healing, invigorating air of the country beyond the Bath streets, and left her at her own door in Upper Camden Place with such a kiss as that bestowed by Caroline herself in the drawing-room of the Royal Crescent.

Mrs. Templar might, as we have said, have carried her cousin off into the cool, fresh air of the country, but did not do so. She on the contrary, took her place alone in her handsome carriage, and in traversing the streets between her own residence and the New Warminster Road, was even more than ordinarily regardless of the many eyes turned towards her. Her own eyes, directed straight

onwards—for this was her especial *trait* in thought—beheld neither the persons in the streets nor, a little later, the features of a charming landscape. I do not think the interview with Caroline will be without result. But perhaps we shall discover.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRIVATE BOX.

MR. TEMPLAR never went to dinners; never to balls. Concerts and the Play were the only evening amusements he attended.

The private box he was accustomed to occupy once or twice a week throughout the season in the charming little theatre of that day, was a small one, and it was understood by his friends that he went for the comedy or the music, and cared not to be intruded on. It was a small box near the bend of the house;

and in the open part of this, seated on the chair nearest the stage, and conspicuous there by his crimson velvet waistcoat and frilled shirt, his wig resembling those worn in the time of the Regency, his gold-rimmed double eye glass, closed and pendant, and the opera-glass in his hand, he was to be seen on the night of which I am writing. A large and costly bouquet on the front cushion of the box, alone indicated the presence of his lady, by whom he was not unfrequently accompanied. Within the shadow of the curtain that divided her from the adjoining one, and which, while it screened her from the audience, permitted her a view of the actors, Mrs. Templar indulged, or was absorbed by, her own reflections. She heard the entrance of a person into the box on her left, felt that his shoulder pressed from time to time somewhat heavily the partition against which her own head reclined, saw the silk curtain slightly stirred by the movement of his arm, and remained equally indifferent to this person's vicinity and to

the business of the stage. It was not until the play had concluded and the drop scene was about to rise for the favourite Cachuca, that a second gentleman was added to the first, and that the reply to the salutation of the last comer was given in the voice of Montresor.

The start made by Nettine must have been felt by one if not both of the occupants of the next box, and caused even Mr. Templar to turn his head in her direction. He was perhaps not unaccustomed to eccentric movements on the part of his wife, and without inquiry he resumed his opera-glass and his expectation of the preliminary bound to the foot-lights of the young danseuse, whose tragical ending is so well known.

An exquisite pleasure was there to Mrs. Templar in her position,—a pleasure mingled with anger against herself for not having sooner become aware of her own happiness,—aware of it while Montresor was still the only tenant of the box. He knew nothing of her pre-

sence ; and for reasons on which she would not pause, reasons she would not examine, she permitted him to remain in ignorance of it. It appeared to her—to her who knew, or thought she knew, him so well—that he, too, had not greatly desired to be disturbed. His ready, pleasant voice wanted its very readiest and pleasantest tone. The occasional rustle of a play-bill indicated either a reference to the business of the evening, or a disposition to return to a reverie for which the business of the evening might serve as an excuse. The thought, almost the belief, that she had been the subject of that reverie imparted a transparency to the cheek of Nettine, and a lustre to her eyes, that nothing in the house or on the stage came near.

For some minutes she could hardly be said to hear what passed in the box: the *voices* only of Montresor and his friend reached her ear. It was the pretty loud applause by the house of some *tour de force* of its pet dancer that restored the clearness of her perceptions.

“A nice little thing!” said the voice Nettie did not recognize, “I believe a good little thing too. And she improves in her dancing. Well done, by Jove! She had a little success the other night—did you hear it?—that made Celeste stare. Are the Merediths here?”

“Opposite — third from the stage. Wing is just entering their box.”

“How pale that girl looks! They say she hates him.”

“Very sad indeed!”

“‘Sad!’ do you call it? I call it something else than ‘sad.’ I tell you what,—I hear from very good authority it’s her own doing. The parents have never urged it,—though of course most people won’t believe *that*.”

“One is glad to know it to be the case.”

“Humph! that’s according——. It leaves one very little choice of opinions as to *her*. By Jove! she sits there as nearly an angel to look at, as a man could well worship; faultless in bearing and countenance, perfectly brought up, surrounded with all that should preserve

dignity—delicacy—decency ; yet as deficient in all three as any thing we see here. I respect a thousand times more the elder girl, who wants to run away, they say, with the Master of Ravenswood.”

“No, no! you speak strongly.”

“I feel strongly. She knows Wing thoroughly ——”

“No,—no!”

“As thoroughly as a woman *can* know the man she has had before her eyes and in her ears for two whole seasons. Agatha Meredith is no fool—so to speak. Take my word for it she knows Wing for what he is, and has the good taste to dislike him for being what he is ; yet is without the honesty or decency to refuse herself to his eight thousand a year and title. I dare say nine tenths of society (as assembled here) would think me a brute ; but in my eyes want of self-respect is want of self respect, sit where it may.”

Here the applause in which the redemanded Cachuca came to an end, prevented Mrs.

Templar from hearing for some moments, more of the observations of Colonel Montresor's friend. When this applause had died away it was Montresor himself who was speaking.

"In a case of such extreme youth" he said, and Nettine thought he no longer spoke of Agatha Meredith, "in a case of such extreme youth, the thing must be differently regarded."

"Humph!—Youth,—well —perhaps --- yes! Extreme youth reduces such a marriage from the worst of faults to the worst of misfortunes. It remains *that*---eh? Granted a girl makes such a marriage before she can be supposed to have attained to womanly self respect, will she ever attain to self-respect after such a marriage?"

Breathlessly Nettine listened for the answer to this question.

"There is, at least," replied Montresor, after a little pause, "grave reason to doubt it."

It was after this evening that the beautiful

eyes of Mrs. Templar took for Montresor a pleading, deprecating look, that probably drew him towards her more than any other possible phase of attraction could have done. I know that at this time his thoughts were a good deal on a business matter he desired to have settled before he quitted England; and I know also that an anxiety greater than any business matter of his own could have occasioned him, was possessing his mind. Had it been otherwise, those eyes of Nettine might have been oftener present to him in her absence. He might have carried them with him, so to speak, from the drawing-room or the ball-room to his own home, and found himself speculating as to what that always singular expression in them might mean. That she was unsatisfied with her lot, he did, I think, perceive. That, in the future, danger to her might arise out of this dissatisfaction had, I think, occurred to him. I even believe I have detected a dawning apprehensiveness in the regards turned towards her when Sir

Walter Wing (after the manner peculiar to that baronet) has been holding her very closely to him in a waltz; or when "Pretty Percival" with the ingenuous eyes and fair curling hair and character for *bonnes fortunes*, has remained for a longer time than usual seated by her side. This apprehensiveness, however, a little observation of her face would dispel; and in meeting her eyes he would, very ordinarily, advance, and occupy the place vacated by "Pretty Percival" or "Precious Percival,"—for the one name was as often given to that Adonis as the other—himself. And this might have gone on longer, but for the visit to the Royal Crescent of a person clearer-seeing or less pre-occupied than Montresor.

"MY DEAREST EMILY,

"The pleasure my visit to Bath is affording, and likely to afford, me, will best reward your indulgence in permitting a four days' longer absence from yourself. I find

our friend in his best looks and spirits, delightfully located here, and surrounded by a society which we may have, I believe, a little undervalued.

“I must be most ungratefully brief, my love, for the library clock warns me that it wants but five and thirty minutes of dinner, at which Montresor entertains six guests besides myself. When I tell you that we shall quit his table for a ‘music,’ and that, in its turn, for a ball, your foresight will prevent the necessity of a request that all appliances to a severe fit of the gout may await my return to ‘the Hermitage.’

“The visit about which you have so reasonable a curiosity has been made within the last hour. The young lady is not, I believe, very intelligent, and has still something to learn before she can pass muster in society,—in the first place, and the sooner the better, a becoming attention to her husband. Considering her youth and present opportunities, we may expect an improvement. In the

meantime, she has remarkably fine eyes (that do not quite please me), a charming voice, and a pretty finger in an accompaniment. Poor Templar looks, of course, like her grandfather. Our engagements will not allow us to accept a hospitable invitation to dinner, which I am told he does not frequently give; but we are to eat ices and hear a little music in his drawing-room, on Thursday evening, the last of my visit to Bath."

While eating these ices and hearing this music, I know not what new discoveries the Hon. Augustus, whose was the above letter, made in the remarkably fine eyes that did not please him. I only know that of a letter written from London on his way to the north, the following was the concluding paragraph.

"Apropos of the lovely little lady in whose society we spent so agreeably two hours of last evening, I am about to ask

you an impertinent question. Is her heart likely to be as little impressionable as your own? Now forgive, in the first moment you can do so,

“Yours affectionately,

“A. DAMER.”

Certainly the look of displeased surprise that took possession of the face of Montresor in reading the above lines, was one very rarely discernible there, and sufficiently explained his friend's preference of a written warning over a warning uttered by the lips. Nor did this displeasure quickly subside. It held while he gravely breakfasted; held while he read two or three other letters brought him by the same post; held while, his breakfast ended, he took several thoughtful turns in the apartment; held even when, having retired to the library and opened the volume in which a paper-knife marked the chapter he had reached, he proceeded to cut several further pages without for some minutes read-

ing a line. For myself, I do not think such a paragraph, written by any friend whatsoever, would have been found worth so much thought, had he not discovered on it—so to speak—some endorsement of his own. There are perceptions, tolerably distinct, yet nevertheless so fine that they will bear no words, hardly even thoughts. Whether on the part of Montresor there had been lately, quite lately, as lately perhaps as on the evening of which the Hon. Augustus wrote, any thing of this, I know not. But I *do* know that he did not ordinarily submit to see with the eyes of others. I *do* know of a large amount of generosity and the chivalresque within him that would have risen if it might, to rescue a woman from the charge of having opened her heart to a man who had never sought by word or look, or entertained a desire, to enter it. After all, this sort of speculation is not my *forte*; and a person is explained by his own actions a thousand times better than by the analysis of any biographer. The actions of

Montresor in regard to "the lovely little lady" spoken of by Mr. Damer, I will, at least, place conscientiously before the reader.

A concert at the house of our old acquaintance, Miss Mackenzie Browne, on the same evening, affords me the first opportunity, and a speedy one, of commencing to redeem the above promise. Mr. and Mrs. Templar and Montresor were all present at it. It had been the custom of the latter on such occasions to pass a portion of the evening by the lovely lady's side, and his conduct on this night and in this respect was not exceptional further than in the greater brevity than usual of the time referred to, and in his early retirement from the festivity. The following day was Sunday—Easter Sunday. It had been Montresor's custom to return from St. Margaret's chapel with Mr. and Mrs. Templar after morning service, to take two or three turns on the Crescent in their company, or to enter with them into their house; sometimes to do all these things. On this Sunday he returned

from Church with them, as was his wont, took two turns on the Crescent in their company, and parted from them at their own door.

After Easter Sunday, comes, of course, Easter Monday; and on Easter Monday there took place, five and twenty years or so ago—and I am told takes place still—the public ball of the Bath season. It was, and is, a fancy ball, and gathered together a number of persons from a distance, whom the weekly and private subscription balls had no power to attract. Montresor had not intended wearing—I need hardly say it—a fancy dress, but he had at one time purposed to attend the ball. Notwithstanding that he had so purposed, he returned from a dinner party to his own house about ten o'clock on the evening in question, and while his front windows shook with the sound of carriages rattling over the stones of the Crescent on their way to the Assembly rooms, he betook himself to his library, adjusted his reading lamp, selected

his book, made a little search—successful and by no means prolonged—for his pet paper-knife, and finally seated himself into the comfortable leather chair he most affected for his evening lecture.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONDINE.

FOR years succeeding the one deadly disappointment of his apparently prosperous life, want of sleep had been the physical ailment of Montresor. Only time and patience, air and exercise, and an unflinching perseverance in sitting up late, however weary, and in rising early, however unrefreshed, had at length triumphed to some extent; and, retiring between two and three o'clock, and rising consistently at seven, he could now

command, he usually found, three or four hours sleep.

The roll of carriages had long ceased, and had not yet again begun to be heard, and all within the house of Montresor had been for hours completely still, when a loud peal from the hall door bell rang through the passages, penetrated the double doors of the library, and caused the wakeful master of the mansion to lay down his book and turn his eyes towards the clock on the mantel-piece. It wanted but a quarter of two, and Montresor rose from his chair in considerable surprise. Runaway rings at the august doors of houses in the Crescent were of unfrequent occurrence, and that his own bell had been mistaken for one more interested in the gaieties of the night, was the supposition that presented itself to his mind in quitting the library to investigate the matter.

“Do not get up, Rawlings,” he called to his butler, whose sleeping apartment was almost at the foot of the stairs; and proceeded.

through the hall, and to undo the fastenings of the front door. He had no sooner opened this last than a note was put into his hand by a boy who rushed away at the same moment.

Astonished, unquestionably, Montresor returned to the room he had left, and in approaching the lamp with the billet he had just received, his face changed remarkably.

“*Ask for Mrs. Hylton's rooms at the York House. I am there. Come to me!*” were the words, and the only ones, the note contained; but Montresor's eyes continued to regard them, and even when he had turned the paper and re-examined the address, he stood there still holding it, and looking less like a person awake than one in a dream.

This not for long, however. A flush began to overspread his face. He crossed the room lightly and quickly to a cabinet, fitted a key to a lock, opened a drawer, withdrew from it a sealed packet, which he likewise opened; and selected from the contents a small sheet

of pale pink paper, on which appeared a few written lines, in a lady's hand. It was a graceful little letter, thanking him for a book of which he was the author, and signed "Julia Verity." His object in examining such a letter at such a moment was not for one instant doubtful. He held it to the lamp, side by side with the note so recently delivered to him. The one was carefully written with a delicate pen, the other hurriedly with a pencil; yet the peculiarities of the writing—and these were several—were unmistakably the same. Satisfied, or all but satisfied, in regard to this, Montresor locked both papers into the same drawer, covered for the space of a minute his eyes from the light even of his own lamp, then possessed himself of his hat, and quitted the house.

At the hour I have mentioned, on the morning of that Easter Tuesday, the York Hotel presented the singular contradiction of a house at once full and empty. Had travellers arrived at the door they would cer-

tainly have been told that they could not have beds, that the house was "full." Yet the bells and passages were silent, the staircase deserted, the visitors apartments, with but one one exception (that I know of), unoccupied. Those who had engaged the beds and the rooms were at the ball.

In one visitor's room, however, of this hotel—a moderately-sized one at the end of a gallery—there stood, about two o'clock, before a brilliant fire, and with regards fixed upon its flame, a lady, whose rich velvet cloak concealed, to a certain extent, a white ball-dress still sufficiently visible. It happened that though a glass at the side of the room reflected these facts, none surmounted the chimney-piece, towards which the lady's face was slightly bowed. We have no desire, however, to keep the reader in suspense,—she was Mrs. Templar.

Probably she personated Ondine, for a wreath of water lilies replaced her favourite circlet of diamonds, and the diamonds, de-

tached, or others of equal beauty, glittered here and there, and everywhere, amidst the masses of her unbound and artistically-tangled hair.

It presently became evident that, notwithstanding the remoteness from the door of the position she had chosen, her bowed attitude was occasioned by the intentness with which she listened for the slightest movement beyond it. In a few minutes she sprang up erect, and with a start that carried her into the middle of the room.

Never had she looked more beautiful. Her face was like Parian marble, lighted from within. Her eyes shone lustrously; the large water lilies added to her height; and her bosom, arms, and the shining fabric of gauze her opening mantle revealed, gleamed with jewels. Her ears had not deceived her, and the door was thrown open to admit Montresor—Montresor whose eyes met hers in the moment of his entrance, and then fell to the ground.

He advanced, however, towards her, a distinct flush—such as unpleasant surprise, or extreme disappointment, or, on the other hand, emotions of quite an opposite character, might equally have produced—rising in his face.

He advanced towards her, and, taking her hand—a hand as cold as he had perceived her face to be colourless—he led her straight to the nearest sofa, and, his eyes still fixed on the carpet, placed himself by her side.

“What,” he said gently, “is the matter?”

“Nothing is the matter.”

“Why,” he asked, in the same tone, “are you here?”

“Because,” she replied, after a pause, “you were not at the ball, and because—Mr. Damer spoke of your going abroad.”

“You are in the apartment of some friend of yours?”

“Of Mrs. Hylton, of Hylton Grove. I dressed here for the ball; that is, her maid dressed my hair.”

“What a beautiful dress! Ondine, is it not?”

“Yes, Ondine.”

“And you wished me to see it, and wish me to return with you to the ball?”

“No!” exclaimed Nettine. “I hate the ball, and hate my dress, and hate being Mrs. Templar, and I am here to ask you to take me abroad with you.”

There was a silence—a very short one—broken by the rapidly-increasing passionate-ness and excitement of Nettine, who, with flashing eyes that never moved from the features of the person she addressed, started to her feet.

“Mr. Damer,” she said, “has come between us. I saw that he did not like me. I heard in his voice that he did not. He has spoken of me to you; yes, you cannot deny it. He has said that you are compromising yourself with a woman who has married a man for diamonds; who had no self-respect, and never will have any. It is cruel; it is even false

I knew not—I knew not—My God! *I was a child.*”

“And,” replied Montresor, gently taking her almost convulsed hands into his own, and for the first time earnestly regarding her, “you are still a child. You are still a child, and the most generous of children. You are generous; but what should I be—I who am not a child—if I were to take advantage of your generosity?”

Nettine was silent, with eyes always fixed immovably on his.

“What should I be? I will tell you. I should be dishonourable in my own eyes; dishonourable in the eyes of others; dishonourable in your eyes when you cease to be a child, and come to be a woman.”

“When,” asked Nettine, “will that be.”

Yet her voice faltered a little, and her eyes shone less and were less steady. She was becoming subdued under his gaze, and that firm, quiet holding of her hands. It was so new an aspect of the matter that she was

beginning to feel child-like, and, moreover, like a child tenderly and judiciously reproved. Nevertheless Montresor could discern neither shame, nor penitence, nor the symptoms of a single tear. Her face wore a perplexed expression. She was looking a little bewildered and, even, as I have said, subdued. But her throat was still, and her eyes dark and beautiful as ever—more than ever beautiful, perhaps, with that new, troubled softness that left them always unconvinced.

“When you are one,” Montresor replied, “we will speak of this again, if you choose to do so. But you will not choose; for when you are a woman, you will know that in this world there is much that is terrible to bear, and that the brave do bear it without afflicting others by their misery. I have had much to bear.”

“You!”

“Few men perhaps so much. There have been times in the past when I have doubted my power to endure; nay, there are such

times even in the present. Yet," he said, smiling, "I add my little candle to the brightness that here and there, and now and then, is amongst us. I have wished that it should increase a little the light round yourself."

Closer and closer she clasped his hands as he spoke, and looked into his eyes with hers that were again shining and immovable. Have I said she was subdued? No! Acquiescent, not subdued; obedient, but always unyielding. While she stood there clasping his hands she knew that all brightness for her must be with him. Since he desired it, this inexpressible brilliancy of being with him must be deferred, but never, never relinquished.

"And now," he said, "you must return to the ball!"

"To the ball!"

"Or home;—let me think. You came here alone?"

"Alone."

Have I said they had risen from the sofa?

And now he disengaged his hands and with bent head walked two or three times the length of the apartment, her eyes following him. At the end of the third turn he paused before her.

“I advise you to return to the Rooms, but not to the ball-room. I think you had better go to the cloak-room, and there wait for your carriage which, as it is now half-past two, will I presume soon be in attendance. I trust,” he said very gravely, “no inquiries regarding this night will be made. I trust they will not, and I think they will not, but—if otherwise—you must, I fear, submit to allege indisposition and an unwillingness to alarm your husband as the causes of your coming here. The man who showed me up—was he the same you saw?”

“Yes. I do not think he saw me,—my face, I mean.”

“He was formerly in my service, and if you will let me leave you for a minute, I will desire him not to occasion Mrs. Hylton any uneasiness.”

"You will come back?"

"Yes, I will come back."

"And now," he said, when he did come back, and found her standing exactly where, and as, he had left her, "can I help you to adjust your cloak? We will pin up some of this pretty gauze under it, I think."

This he effected, somewhat ruthlessly shortening, compressing, and concealing the light drapery of Ondine. Then he drew with his own hands the hood of the mantle over the head, and wreath, and the greater part of the face, of the beautiful personifier of the water-nymph.

"That," he said, "will do famously. Your dress will no longer attract notice, or even present any points for recognition. Are you ready?"

"Yes," Nettine replied, but nevertheless held fast one hand of his, while her beautiful eyes refused to leave his own. They pleaded—those beautiful eyes—as in a matter of life and death, for one such movement of affection

as should serve as a bond between them through this world, to the end of time. They pleaded, and he could not, or he did not, resist their pleading. He was wrong, but we cannot always be right, and in this way his one act of treason was committed. He bent and kissed her. Then she suffered him to lead her from the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNHEALED.

PERSONS acquainted with Bath are aware that the distance between the York House and the Assembly Rooms is very trifling indeed. That between the Assembly Rooms and the Crescent is greater. Nevertheless, the clocks in Colonel Montresor's house were only striking three as he entered his own hall and replaced the fastenings of the street-door. Having done this, and presented to the supposed solitude of his library a face pained and

wearily to an extent the reader has never yet beheld it, he threw himself into an arm chair; nor did he quit this last till the fire had burned low in the grate, and the morning light could no longer be kept out by the curtains.

Then he rose; unlocked the drawer we have seen him open at an earlier hour; separated from the little packet of more precious documents the note he had recently added to them; relocked the drawer; dropped the note itself into the still red embers of the expiring fire, amidst which it shrivelled and blackened and disappeared; and, having extinguished the lamp, ascended to his bed-room. Not, I fear, to obtain any sleep. The extraordinary expectation and disappointment of that morning, with all its minor regrets, vexations, and anxieties, had probably banished *that*, not only from the present, but from many future dawns of day.

It was, therefore, with particular pleasure that the old butler placed a letter from Lady

Douglas Arden at the very top of the half dozen he delivered to his master at breakfast time. Montresor's weariest eyes would brighten at the sight of his daughter's handwriting, and this occasion presented no exception to the rule. The second letter he opened was from Mr. Damer, and as follows:—

“DEAR HARRY,

“You will not be a little astonished to learn that I only arrived here late last night, having spent six and thirty hours of the interval within, I fancy, six and twenty miles of yourself. I had hardly sealed my letter to you of the — inst., when, by one of the posts that puzzle and even disconcert an old-fashioned person like myself, a letter from my wife reached my hand. A communication from dear Lady W. had rendered her uneasy; and she expressed a desire that I would, even at some inconvenience, return on my steps to make a visit to our old friend.

A little later I was travelling towards West Court.

“Quitting the train at Westbridge I posted the remainder of the distance ; and while making the little journey between Westbridge and West Court, reminded myself of the last time I travelled the same road. It was on a warm night in August—the August of last year ; and I waked from a doze, into which I had fallen, in the belief for a minute that I was in my old box at the King’s Theatre, and that a dance of villagers was occupying the stage. There was, at a little distance, the chateau, from the terrace of which steps descended to the greensward. To the left of the foreground, were tables spread beneath the trees ; to the right, peasants in holiday costume, ribboned and garlanded, danced to the music of two fiddles and a clarionet on a smoothly shaven lawn. The orthodox group of elders, withdrawn a little from the rest, gossipped together (and I even think I saw a pipe or two amongst them) as they looked on. The inevi-

table visitors, too, from the chateau were not wanting. And in the centre of all, and conspicuous amid all, and distinct from all, was the Seigneuress herself, a tall, graceful, lovely lady, clad in white, holding in either hand a radiant village child, and looking—in the light of the moon, and of the coloured lamps that wreathed the portico, and hung in festoons above the dancers' heads, and gleamed amid the foliage of the trees—more like a being from another world than any thing one often sees in this. I rubbed my eyes, and I perceived where I was,—that I was not at the Opera, but simply beholding from the windows of my post-chariot a rustic fête in the grounds of a gentleman's or nobleman's house. The scene had hardly passed from my sight before I was carried through the lodge gates of West Court. I need not tell you that the Chateau was the house of Lord Featherstone, and that the Seigneuress was the Countess. It is, I regret to say, the recent departure of this last to join her husband—who has resided

little in Westshire—on the Continent, that is depressing our old friend to an extent that not unreasonably alarms my wife.

“ I found the dear lady looking ill, but unconscious of any distinct ailment; admitting, however, that she felt since the departure of Lady Featherstone as if she had moved from the south to the north side of the house. And she feels the loss the more deeply because it is the loss of many others also. ‘ The brightness,’ she said, ‘ has left my day. Nay, it has left the village. Her greatest grief is, I suspect, that she knows not whither it is gone. ‘ I must content myself,’ she said, ‘ in my ignorance with knowing that Lady Featherstone could not but have acted as she has done.’ Beyond this, even to me she would say nothing.”

I do not think the information contained in this letter was new to Montresor; yet long his breakfast remained untouched on the table, and even after this had been removed he might have been found still in the same place

and attitude, or walking in a thoughtful manner up and down the room, or looking from the window, not at things the window gave to view, but at those with which his own mind presented him. I do not think he thought very often or very anxiously of Mrs. Templar. I think quite other anxieties were engrossing him. Even when a message was brought from Mr. Templar, requesting him to look in on his way to the town, it did not affect him particularly. Such messages were of frequent occurrence; and Montresor, when he found Nettine reclined on a drawing-room sofa in a manner proper to a lady who had been up all night at a ball, and her lord perambulating the same apartment with his writing desk open on a table, and London letters in his hands, found also that anxiety would have been misplaced.

After the Easter ball, persons not residents of Bath, but who have passed the winter there, are usually in a hurry to leave it; and even those residents who permit themselves

an annual visit to London, seize the same moment for departure. Old Mr. Templar had been accustomed for years to occupy during the months of May and June the house in Harley Street of an invalid friend who himself passed those two months at one or other of the German spas. This year, however, it was thought proper by the physicians of the invalid that the German Spa should be given up. "A complete mistake," Mr. Templar considered, "which deprived his poor friend of his one chance of getting tolerably through the remainder of the year." It could not, however, be helped; and, not without feeling himself to some extent aggrieved, he had written to a person in London to make inquiries in regard to a suitable house. They were answers to these inquiries, forwarded to himself, that he now held in his hand, and respecting which he desired to consult, or, at any rate, to complain to, Montresor. The terms asked were, he said, exorbitant.

Montresor agreed that they appeared to be

so, and suggested a family hotel. Friends of his, he informed Mr. Templar, had assured him they had found good apartments in a very first-rate hotel of the above class cost them no more than they must have given for a very moderate-sized house, while the gain in comfort and leisure and relief of mind had been immense. At this, Nettine raised herself on her elbow, and said she should like "apartments in an hotel much better than a house."

The old gentleman gave the sort of little dry cough that was with him not a malady but a *trait*. "Mrs. Templar," he said, "is not much acquainted with these matters; and she has, I am glad to think, an extremely good digestion. I own *I* like to know something of my cook."

"Ah, exactly!" Montresor most cheerfully responded: "and to a house you would take your own."

"To a strange house I should certainly take my own. My poor friend Vernon had a very tolerable cook,—not so good as Small,

however; by no means so good. I consider Small a very good cook indeed. I cannot say I have happened to meet with one as good,—at any rate not in the sort of little things Mrs. Templar and I require. I shall most certainly take Small.”

“If I,” said Montresor, “can be of the least service, command me. I shall probably be in London myself in a few days, and if I can do anything for you—see any of these houses, or look at others—only let me know. I shall be charmed to be useful.”

“You are going to London so soon, Colonel Montresor?” asked Mrs. Templar.

“Probably on Friday or Saturday. My programme for the year, subject to the inevitable ‘*Homme propose, Dieu dispose,*’ is generally made early.”

“Do you ‘propose’ to stay long in London?”

“I ‘propose’ to be at least a good deal there during the next two months. In July,” he said, after a moment’s pause, “I visit my daughter in the north. For August I have se-

cured bed and board at Interlachen. September will carry me to the villa of Italian friends at Como. October will find me pausing in Paris on my return; and by the first of November, at the latest, I hope to be permitted to make my bow to Mrs. Templar in the place where I now stand."

Profoundly to this bowed the master of the house, on the part of his wife, whose face a slight change of position had turned towards the wall.

"We," said the former, "do not see our way so clearly, and *we* have lately been in Paris. At the end of the London season, however, I dare say we may find our way to the coast; provided I can arrange to take Small."

BOOK III.



THE COUNTESS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAUBOURG.

“ TO THE LADY EMILY DAMER.

“ You will, my dear Mimi, have already received my letter fixing the hour of our arrival—Montresor's and mine—at your door. Notwithstanding this, I return to you alone.

“ I should not forgive myself if I left you in any surprise. I am disturbed, anxious, apprehensive—have no alarm, my love—on Montresor's account. I find I must write

rapidly, and depend equally on your indulgence and your discretion.

“I mentioned in my last letter that we were to remain two days longer in Paris for the pleasure of dining with our venerable friend in the Faubourg St. Germain. We found assembled at her house a larger party than usual of the agreeable persons she is accustomed to receive, and herself almost as *spirituelle* as we remember her ; more so than most women are in their first youth. The Duchesse de Marsan was present, as well as her son, whose person and air appeared to be all one could desire in a young Frenchman of high birth, fine fortune, and twenty-two years. I made such an observation to the Baron de S., who sat with me at dinner.

“‘It is true,’ he answered. ‘Nevertheless, this young man is at the present moment occasioning a terrible anxiety to his friends.’

“‘I regret it!’ I replied; and the baron drew his chair a little closer to mine.

“‘He is,’ he said, ‘a year married ; and

his marriage to a kinswoman of his own united more intimately one of the oldest, and one of the most illustrious families of France. He appeared to be the adoring husband of a young wife, who loves him like a romance. They have a little son three months old.'

“‘And where, then,’ I asked, ‘the anxiety?’

“‘The baron shrugged his shoulders.

“‘It remains for you,’ he said, ‘to hear.’

“‘There is at this moment,’ he proceeded, ‘a certain circle in Paris, composed of persons with whom men of honour can only for particular purposes associate, and whom women of reputation do not recognise. You will say, “Bah! this is not extraordinary!” It is true; but the distinguishing feature of this particular circle, and its dangerous one, is, the really high rank of some of the persons who assist in composing it. The individual, for instance, by whom it principally lives and moves, and to whom it owes its *verve*, its brilliancy, is —notwithstanding that he could not without more than ordinary hardihood present himself in

different society—the Marquis de la Roche Brienne, and the representative of one of the oldest houses in France.

“‘At the head of his establishment is his sister, the Viscountess de Pérault, a widow, but for years separated from her husband; and so notorious, that women blush, or desire to do so, if her name be mentioned. There are, besides these, others of more unquestionable rank than often descends to such a position.’

“‘And the attraction? play of course.’

“‘Play,’ responded the baron, ‘and other things perhaps equally ruinous. But, to confine ourselves to the duke, this circle has recently received the addition of an English nobleman and a lady who is, or calls herself, his wife. It is of this last that De Marsan has become, in a few weeks, violently enamoured. These people have at once ascended, or the reverse, to a prominent position. There is little doubt of the rank of the first; and the last is pronounced by some who have seen

her to have the manners of good society, while by De Marsan we are told she is as beautiful as a dream.'

" 'He speaks, then, of her!' I exclaimed.

" 'Amongst men. Amongst his immediate friends he makes no secret of his passion. He is less communicative on the subject of his losses at play, which, it is rumoured, amount already to a third of his fortune. In the meanwhile, his young wife, who cares nothing for his income, everything for his heart, dissolves away in her tears; her relations are transported with mortification and anger, and his own exasperate the offender by condemnation of the accepted cause of his offence. On the whole, you perceive the inconvenience.

" 'And,' continued the Baron, 'it has produced the greater consternation in his friends, since up to the time of his acquaintance with this woman he was known to entertain a positive aversion to cards. But he is looking towards us, and I perceive in his eyes that he

thinks we may be speaking of him. Do not glance in the direction of L., but if you have any inclination for a look in a philosophical way at these people, he is the man who can show them to you.'

"I assured him I was absolutely without curiosity, and expressed my surprise that Monsieur de L. should be the visitor of the persons he had described.

"'He is,' he returned, 'nearly related to Monsieur de la Roche Brienne; and as he occasionally plays high, and prefers doing so when least in the eye of the world, he is sometimes to be found amongst the guests of the Marquis.'

"We had not very long withdrawn to the salon prepared for the reception of evening guests, before I observed the Marquise conversing earnestly with Montresor, and, presently afterwards, was myself invited to the sofa on which they sat. In joining them I suspected the subject on the *tapis*, and which had overspread with an unusual paleness the

face of our venerable friend, to be one not new to me. Nor was I mistaken. In fact, I listened almost to a repetition of what I had already heard. Yet I cannot do better than give you the words of the Marquise.

“‘My two friends,’ she said, turning from Montresor to me, and again from me to him, a tender and benevolent confidence seeming to render even more amiable her always agreeable features, ‘my two friends, Montresor and Damer, I have believed you will not refuse to render me an important service which I am about to ask at your hands. Nay, neither will I have you pledge yourselves blindly. The amiable readiness that appears in your countenances merits well entire candour on my part; and since I desire not less your sympathy than your assistance, let me not seek to conceal from you the cause of an anxiety which is frightful.

“‘Your eye,’ she said to me, who perhaps had not sufficiently prevented myself from turning involuntarily my regards on the

person whom I believed to be the subject of this address, 'your eye falls on De Marsan. Naturally so! since for whom can so fitly be an old woman's anxieties, as for those who are just entering on the path of which she has nearly reached the end? Alas! yes. It is for this dear grandson whom we all love so tenderly, and whose happiness we desire so much more ardently than our own, that we are at this moment suffering terrible apprehensions.

“It is scarcely more than a year since we believed his felicity assured by his marriage with one very dear to us, and whom we have known from her birth. This marriage, my dear friends, drew more closely together two families already united, and the birth of a child, three months ago, left us, we then thought, nothing further to desire.

“Our charming Eugénie adores her husband: nay, look at him—do you wonder at it? Alas! he is even now quitting the room, and her fine eyes follow him—do you per-

ceive—how mournfully!’ Here the Marquise sighed. ‘It should strengthen my purpose. My two friends, it is indeed true; you can serve me.

“‘There is a certain house—let me assure myself that I describe it rightly’—and the old lady consulted a pocket-book drawn from a reticule she carried, and all this with a little mournful air that had too much sincerity to inspire a smile. ‘Yes, it is here: Numero — Rue de la ——. In this house, which is hired by Monsieur le Marquis de la Roche Brienne, assemble constantly persons whom, but for the necessity, one would not name. It is painful to think that this man himself represents a family of the ancient noblesse. *Hélas! la pauvre France!* But let us not wander from the immediate subject.

“‘In the midst of this dreadful society has lately arrived a countryman of yours—an English Lord Featherstone—and with him a person who passes for his wife. My dear friends, it is this terrible woman who has

desolated, *dechiré* us all, by ensnaring our beloved though faulty De Marsan.

“ I almost *felt* Montresor start at the unexpected mention of this name, which he is always so unable to hear without emotion. Our amiable old Marquise was, however, too profoundly occupied with her own family distress to observe any appearance of increased interest in the countenances of her auditors; and after lightly applying her *mouchoir* to her eyes, in which she perhaps imagined there were tears that certainly could not have fallen with impunity over cheeks not guiltless of art, she continued,

“ “ If I can even preserve patience while I tell you that this person has introduced our unhappy grandchild to a gaming table at which we have reason to fear his losses have been in so short a time enormous, how shall I find it possible to restrain my indignation in acquainting you that for this detestable end she has employed the yet more detestable means of inspiring him with a passion for herself.

A passion,' she continued, after [a moment's pause, 'that has weakened every legitimate tie, rendered him indifferent to all that formerly interested him, and threatens to rend into pieces his entire happiness. My two friends, you already perceive how you can serve me.'

“ ‘You desire,’ said Montresor, with a wonderful composure, ‘that we should visit this house?’

“ ‘It is asking much,’ the Marquise replied, ‘I am well sensible of it ; yet I dare ask it of you—of you, my Montresor and Damer, who are men of the world, who are without prejudice, and above the reach of detraction. I do desire that you should form an opinion of this house, of the perils to which a young man is exposed in frequenting it, and—especially—of the audacious woman—in any case audacious—who is capable of representing herself to be the wife of an English nobleman. I see,’ continued the old lady, ‘an intention to oblige me in the face of Montresor ;

but in that of Damer,' and she laid her hand on mine, 'I see something more: I see that he knows how it may be done.'

"Montresor regarded me with surprise when I admitted that I believed I could without difficulty, and in that very room, obtain the promise of an introduction to the *salons* of Monsieur de la Roche Brienne.

"'But this night?' she eagerly exclaimed. 'Is it that my dear friends will visit these execrable persons this night?'

"I could not at that moment promise her so much; but, in fact, on speaking to Monsieur de L., I found he would be charmed to present Montresor and myself the same evening.

"My love, it is not my intention to carry you with me to the Rue de la ——. I have already to beg your indulgence. In truth, our visit was an extremely brief one. Having made our bows in the proper quarter, we—Montresor and I—passed on through the rooms.

“We reached the last without having beheld the person whom it could not be said we hoped to see. Neither in this last did we discover her. However, we had not yet encountered De Marsan. It was in retracing our steps that I knew rather than saw that the eye of Montresor had found what it sought, and my own eyes, following the direction in which his head was ever so slightly turned, rested at once on the peculiar profile of the Duke, which interposed between me and the face of a lady with whom the young Frenchman conversed, and whose pale grey satin robe, bordered with lace, swept the carpet at his feet. In the next moment a movement on his part gave to view the beautiful features of Lady Featherstone.

“Well acquainted as you are with the foible, the fault, of Montresor (may I not call it so since it is his only one?) you will be less surprised than would another when I tell you that not the faintest indication did he give of having seen what I knew he had seen. On-

wards we walked through the apartments, neither speaking nor spoken to, till, on reaching the door of the one nearest the staircase, he said, and turned on me but for a moment a cold, withheld eye—

“‘Do we wish to remain longer?’

“You will easily imagine my answer; but even you will not imagine that he made not the slightest allusion to the subject uppermost in both our thoughts during the drive to our hotel; nay, that when arrived there he simply said—

“‘We shall meet at breakfast in the morning!’ and escaped from the pressure of my hand to his own chamber.

“Rendered watchful myself by the incidents of the night, I could distinctly hear him traversing his room, with a step, however, (that he might not disturb me) as light as a woman's. My Mimi! what a pained and haggard, yet—to one who knows him as I do—excited face did he present at the breakfast table this morning! Would he possessed not

this reserve, this reticence, this proud, sensitive avoidance of human sympathy, that is absolutely ungenerous among friends! But it was his from a boy. I cannot remember him under illness or injury acknowledging pain. Yet his own sympathies are large, his tenderness unbounded. May it not be that he is conscious of an acuter sensibility than others to suffering?—that he dare not test his self-command too far?—that he desires to spare those he loves the spectacle of his agony? My love, the traces of a more than ordinary agony were discernible beneath the outward calmness of his countenance when, in meeting me this morning, he informed me—certainly not to my surprise—that he was about to throw himself on my indulgence and yours; that he might remain in Paris a week or many weeks; but that he must remain.

“‘I propose,’ he said, ‘to call to-day on Lady Featherstone, and ascertain in what way I can be most useful to her.’

“‘And the Marquise?’ I asked, averting

my eye from the painful sight of a face so calm upon the surface, so convulsed beneath. 'And the Marquise?'

"I will beg you to tell her from me—you will perhaps desire to do so from yourself, but at any rate from me—that when the Duke, her grandson, is in the society of the Countess of Featherstone, he is in the society of the most irreproachable of English ladies. Add, if I may beg it of you, that I propose myself the pleasure of inquiring after her health and that of the Duchesse not later than to-morrow, during her hours of reception.'

"I devoutly trust our esteemed old friend may by to-morrow have sufficiently schooled her features not to betray to Montresor any of the incredulity they but faintly attempted to conceal from me. My impression is that she believes, since this misrepresented lady has enlisted Montresor and your humble servant among the number of her champions, the rescue of her grandson from his infatuation must be considered hopeless. I regret

to feel that, with the best endeavours in the world, I by no means lightened her tribulation.

“ My love, I end as I begun. I am anxious, even gravely anxious, on Montresor's account. His sensitiveness and spirit, the character of Lord Featherstone, and the painfully questionable position of the unfortunate Countess, inspire me with serious, if not very distinct, apprehensions. This, however, for our own fireside.

“ I hope to be with you on Saturday at the hour I have mentioned. All this makes me look to ‘ The Hermitage ’ as my Ararat.’

* * * * *

CHAPTER II.

THE BOULEVARD.

I WILL ask the reader who has gone with me thus far, to precede by a few minutes the steps of Montresor in the direction of a house in one of the most animated thoroughfares of Paris. A handsome floor in this house was rented by the English nobleman whose name has been so frankly used in the last chapter, and the reader who precedes, as I have invited him to do, the steps of Montresor, may find himself on a bright October afternoon within

a small but elegant chamber, whose single window gives on the brilliant boulevard, and which is tenanted by a beautiful woman and a man apparently several years younger than herself. This young man has just risen with some vexation, some anger, some shame even, from his knee.

“Monsieur le Duc,” said the beautiful woman, “you have painfully surprised me.”

“Madame,” the young nobleman responded, “I have but this to say in my justification—that a countrywoman of my own would not have been surprised.”

The voices of each were low and in consonance with the words they used, that of the Duke having something of the asperity of self-assertion and resentment, while Lady Featherstone's was soft and full as with the emotion of regret. Regret, indeed, was the dominating expression of her features, though, without doubt, an extremely displeased astonishment was there also.

“You speak,” she said, “of country, and I

am perhaps but little acquainted with yours. Yet I believe you do it injustice. Certainly I never conceived the idea that a gentleman of any country could mistake my condescension—yes, Monsieur le Duc, *condescension* to a man of your years. My dearest friend, Monsieur, was the friend of your family. Other dear friends of mine have spoken to me of your talents, your accomplishments, your high fortunes, and your promise to be worthy of them while you were yet a boy. I heard your name with interest. It recalled to me those friends of happier years. And when I saw you enter a circle the brilliancy of which is false while its danger is real, when I saw you exposed to the fascinations of a society which I know better than you could know it, when I beheld you approach tables at which what is called play is the business and bread of some who play there, at which I see men leave behind them wealth, and reputation, and happiness, and the happiness of others; when I saw you, Monsieur,

approach these tables with your ducal coronet, and your princely fortune, and your youth, and your peace, and your honour, and the hopes of a mother, and the happiness of a bride, all, so to speak, in your hand,—I bent forward as I might have bent forward to lead a child from the margin of deep water to a place of safety by my side.”

“All which,” said the Duke, “amount to this—you did flirt with me. I have heard of English flirtation. I did think it was amusement of *jeune demoiselle* who in your country go into society—*petit jeu* for meese. You did play this *petit jeu* with me, Miladi Featherstone; and I—I did think I play the great game. You were not just with me—I was just with you. You do break my heart into pieces; you do blow them away—thus!”

“You are so young, Monsieur de Marsan,” replied Lady Featherstone, regarding him with a composure of feature and of eye that her extreme paleness to some extent belied; “you are so young that I pity you.”

“Ah!” the impetuous, the versatile Frenchman exclaimed, and was in a moment in a *pose* the most theatrical that can be imagined at her feet, “you pity me! You English say the one thing first and the other thing afterwards. You pity me! Adorable Lady Featherstone! you pity me; and pity shall be love.”

“Be so good as to rise, Monsieur le Duc!” said her ladyship. “Rise, sir, and leave me!”

And turning from him and towards the lace draperies that, when unlooped, divided the room from a larger one, the Countess found herself face to face with Montresor.

The profound bow of the latter gave the Duc de Marsan time to obey the very distinct command he had received. So instant, indeed, was his obedience, that the door closed on him ere the whiteness of Lady Featherstone's face had begun to be succeeded by a flush that, commencing with a spot of faint pink on either cheek, could hardly be said to

deepen—but spread, gradually, slowly, painfully, upwards to her hair and down to the delicate collar of her robe, over every part of her fair, fine skin that a morning toilette permitted to be visible. I fear to say how many seconds passed before she sufficiently recovered from her surprise, from much more than surprise, to advance another step, and extend her hand to the man whose betrothed wife she had once been. Bending low, he touched it with his lips as he might have touched the hand of the sovereign in the presence of her court; then he led her to a fauteuil, near which he placed a chair for himself,—and all this without once lifting his eyes to hers.

“Lady Featherstone,” he said, in a tone so low that it could not have been heard a yard beyond where she sat, “while my presence could only pain you I have remained at a distance. Now that pain itself is of secondary moment you see me here.”

The countess gently bent her head; but

her eyes became fixed on the fair slender hands folded on her satin robe, her lip quivered, and the faint but universal flush that had overspread her face when she first looked on Montresor, rose once more to the shining, rippling braids of her beautiful and abundant hair. Nevertheless, the draft on her self-command, so suddenly presented, was not dishonoured.

“Thanks!” she replied; “but let us not speak of pain. In more than six years much must always be forgotten, or less remembered. Let me put away my own annoyances for a time in hearing of you—of things that interest you—of your family—your pursuits?”

“I have none worth your attention,” he quickly, even abruptly, replied. “With me, six years ago are as yesterday, and nothing is ‘less remembered.’ If I cannot be of use to you, I am gone.”

In saying the last words he rose—a little hastily—and went to one of the windows; and for the next minute or two neither he nor

Lady Featherstone spoke. He was the first to do so, and returned, in doing so, to the fauteuil in which she still sat.

“Lady Featherstone! for six years I have not seen you. For nearly that number of months I have not heard of you, till the evening before last, at the Hotel de Marsan.”

“My friend Augustus Damer and I,” he proceeded, meeting her eyes with all the steadiness, with all the inflexibility he could command, “dined there on that evening; and by the lips of the Marquise, and by the lips of others, I heard mention made of Lord Featherstone, and—as I find—of yourself.”

The faint colour again struggled for victory with the whiteness of the countess's cheek, but this time without success.

“As you find!”

Montresor averted his eyes, and he resumed his seat.

“Lady Featherstone,” he said, “you have learned within the last hour that you are not efficiently protected.”

“In the future,” her ladyship replied, after a pause, however, “I shall efficiently protect myself.”

“Yourself—yes!” Montresor answered. “But your name, your fame—no! For God’s sake—for my sake—do not despise even these.”

She made no answer. His words had not been many; but three of those words had already compensated for the pain of twice as many years. They had recovered, so to speak, the lost and broken thread of her life; and linked the Past to a Future—a Future on this side of the grave.

She made no answer, therefore; but sat without sound or movement, and, presently, with tears rolling over her face: and Montresor who, though he neither saw nor heard, still knew that she was weeping, knew that what was simply wretchedness to him was the reverse to her—knew that while he was contemplating their divided destinies, the assurance of his unaltered affection, his sympathy,

and the re-establishment of an understanding between them was filling her heart with light and melody,—Montresor, too, continued silent, till the striking of a clock on the console recalled him to the immediate object of the interview that he had sought.

“Do you,” he asked, “remain here?”

“No! We are quitting Paris.”

He did not for a few moments reply. Then he asked—

“To go where?”

“To England. To *Bath*. Lord Featherstone has received an account of it that has made him think of residing there. Indeed, an agent of his has, I believe, already taken a house.”

“I know Bath,” he presently said. “I was not, however, thinking of Paris, or Bath—of this place, or that. Lady Featherstone! I speak to you as to a sister—can you believe it to be your duty to accompany Lord Featherstone?”

“Believe me,” the countess replied, “it is my

duty to do so. Nay, for reasons I cannot now explain—not now, but some day you will know them—it is my inclination to do so. But my eyes are opened on a point I never deemed it necessary to guard, and I shall now know how to make even such a position as mine respected. Believe me, what you still value shall be very valuable to me.”

“Still!” repeated Montresor, “*still*, did you say?”

“There is a limit,” she faltered; “oh! there *is* a limit to human faith in things unseen!”

And in saying these words—these words so pathetic and that revealed so much—Lady Featherstone extended to Montresor a hand which he held closely with both his own to his heart.

“I never believed it your duty,” he said in a voice, low indeed, but filled, nevertheless, with bitterness, and regarding her as he spoke, “to be reunited to Lord Featherstone; nor did any friend of yours. If I had ever doubted,

the last twenty hours would have satisfied me of your mistake."

"The past," the countess replied, "is past. I supposed myself doing right. I saw at the moment no duty—not even any possibility, but one. Horror, I think, predominated, too—at first, I mean. You are aware, however, that after the house in Westshire was taken, Lord Featherstone resided chiefly abroad. My cousin Diana was then alive; and, till very lately, dear, always dear, Lady W.—Alas! let us speak of other things. You know Bath?"

"I live there."

"You live there! *live!!* You will be near me?"

"I both can and will!" was, after one of those little pauses that read so badly, his emphatic reply. "Only, when you see fit, explain what you leave now unexplained. From this moment," he said, "I devote myself to the protection of your peace of mind. From this moment I have no other object in life. Nor,

since the greatest happiness man ever promised himself is denied me, do I desire any other than this while life shall last."

Having thus spoken, and relinquished the hand he had all this time held, he returned his eyes to the countess's face. A flush—this time of unmistakable happiness; a flush of almost youthful colouring, had overspread it. I do not believe that Montresor had ever seen her look so beautiful. He had never met her, you should remember, till in the serene summer of her loveliness. Now, it was as if a curtain had been for a minute lifted to show him what had been the transcending beauty of its spring. Had the correspondent of my Lord Featherstone beheld her in that minute, he would almost have "seen Julia."

"You have," she said, with the incomparable candour of purity, "made me very happy. And now, tell me something about Bath."

BOOK IV.



NO "GRAPES OF THORNS."

CHAPTER I.

NOVEMBER.

OUT of London, I know no place in which an English November day looks more miserable than in Bath, nor any part of Bath in which the effect is more easily discerned than in its chief Crescent. The very size of this last—as in the case of an ill-lighted ball-room—increases the gloom; and its regularity of feature—as in the case of a cold and inanimate beauty—tends to discouragement and depression.

After town, and, in due time, the “coast,”

Mr. and Mrs. Templar had returned home, as indeed had most of the residents of Bath, for the winter ; and it was on the first day of the month I have named, that Nettine, in looking from the windows of her drawing-room, especially discovered this misery of aspect. Her own feelings were, to some extent, in consonance with what she beheld. Expectation, excitement, impatience, had perhaps had their day,—I should say their days ; and on this one a gloom corresponding, as I have observed, to some extent with what she looked at, had begun to be felt.

Yet the area of comfortless fog that met her eyes, should have raised, not depressed, her spirits. Montresor had said “ Before the 1st of November I hope to make my bow to Mrs. Templar in the place where I now stand.” He had also said, and more recently, “ On the 1st *at the latest*, I shall be in Bath.” Nettine, however, did not believe that his arrival had taken place. At a late hour of the day before it had not ; and if he did not

present himself in her drawing-room on that afternoon, there was no possibility of saying when he might do so.

To her expectation had succeeded a sort of gloom, a bitterness,—so to speak, an infidelity. In looking back, it appeared to her that they had not, after all, seen very much of Montresor in London; while beyond the hours passed in their society he had been a mere mystery. Nettine was aware he had a large number of acquaintances and many friends, and that he entered familiarly into circles where they had no admission. This made it reasonable that his visits to themselves should be comparatively few, and of limited duration; also, that he should often be engaged when they would have included him in their party at home or abroad. She had found it impossible at the time to be displeased. Montresor was invariably kind, and she owed nearly all the little brightness of her London “season” to him. But in looking back it had begun to seem different. The expectatioin of several

days—their expectation and disappointment—had tried her severely. A sinister doubt commenced to hover round the closed doors and windows of her mind. If he loved her (and his kiss was always on her lips), if he loved her, and but forbore to take “advantage of her generosity” till she was of an age, and had acquired sufficient knowledge of herself and of the world, to count the cost of what that world would call a sacrifice, why was he not oftener near her? Love, according to her lights, knew not that sort of generosity. Love, as she understood it, desired above everything else love in return. And it was when her mind had reached this point that she paused at the window to behold the cheerless November afternoon. It entered sharply then, like a knife, into her heart, that it could not have looked so cheerless if Montresor had arrived. From his presence only a few houses off, a ray of sunlight, discernible at least by her eyes, would have streamed out upon the gloom.

All—so it seemed to her young, undisciplined impatience—hung upon this afternoon. If Montresor had not then arrived, he never would arrive, or—never to be aught to her. And giving her self-control to the winds, or to the fog, she violently rung the bell.

“Send Pauline here!” she said to the servant who answered it: and then she paced the room, averting from the windows eyes that scarcely more than a minute after flashed their angry surprise on an unexpected face that appeared at the door. It is a face we have seen—a sallow face with dark eyes and marked eyebrows, and a massive chin; the face of a well-dressed woman, wearing a gold chain over a black silk gown, and a watch at her side.

“Pauline, Madame,” said this woman, “has gone as far as Saville Row, to match a skein of silk of a particular shade she wanted. She desired me to say she would be a very short time absent. Is there anything I can do?”

“ Nothing, Mrs. Davis ! it does not signify ; only send her up when she comes in.”

And Mrs. Templar had scarcely uttered the last sentence, when a double knock at the street door made itself heard.

Mrs. Davis withdrew, and the lady of the house, in her intense expectation and surprise, continued to occupy the place in the centre of the room from which she had first spoken. She was white as wax with her excitement ; her hands were crossed on her breast ; and her eyes, in the unlovely light of the November day, were as brilliant as if lamps and chandeliers had been contributing to their brightness. She was Ondine again.

With each moment more and more nearly her suspense approached to certainty. The door was thrown open, and Colonel Montresor announced. It had scarcely reclosed, ere Nettine had sprang forward, and her hands were in his.

“ It is,” she said, “ the last day you named ; it is the 1st of November.”

“ And I,” Montresor replied, “ am here.”

“ When did you arrive ?”

“ This morning. Let me place you in a chair, and bring one to your side. I travelled without pausing from Paris, arrived to a late breakfast, obtained three hours rest, and, after a fresh toilet, have no feeling of fatigue.”

Yet he was altered, Mrs. Templar thought, in observing him. On the surface his face was the same, but there was something new to her beneath ; and she returned her regards again and again to the problem the change presented. He, on his part, found her, notwithstanding her unmistakable pleasure at his arrival, a little silent, *distrain*, and always asking with her glorious eyes, questions that his never answered. He had a great deal to tell her. Were there not his visits to the North—Switzerland—and the charming residence of his friends by the Lake of Como ? And then, Paris ? Well ! there are more places in Paris than the Hotel de Marsan and

an apartment on the Boulevard —. I dare say, since Nettine would naturally want to hear about scenes she had visited, he had something to say of Paris. What Nettine had to recount in her turn was sooner recounted. Yes! they had been to the coast—to Weymouth,—they had even taken Small;—they had come back again.—I think when the interview was over, the young married lady informed herself—or the whisper came, goodness knows whence, to her ear—that it had not been quite what she expected it to be; that the pleasure, however heightened by the previous pain, had not quite equalled the pain. But, then, she likewise informed herself that it was but the first of many interviews. He was come back! That was the *refrain* throughout her evening of many, many delicious ‘songs without words.’

But when Nettine had ended the considerable history of her own doings, there was still a piece of Bath news for Montresor to

hear. A house in Sydney Place had been taken for the Earl of Featherstone. How! Did he know it already?

He did. The Countess was a friend of his;—a person Nettine would know, and like to know.

“We hear they are not young, and have no children.”

“They have no children, and are not what *you* would call young.”

“How old are they?”

“Lady Featherstone may be about thirty-five.”

Nettine supposed—she said—that nobody could call that young—for a woman.

CHAPTER II.

“HOW I HATE HER!”

I DID not in the preceding chapter mention that, since the return of Mr. and Mrs. Temp- lar from the sea-side, Society had done but little to withdraw the thoughts of the latter from that constant expectation of Montresor that has been spoken of. It is true that very many or very gay parties do not take place in Bath in October: still, towards the end of that month Society is paying its visits, and

leaving its cards, and making its arrangements and its circle for the winter. I am sorry to have to say that but few of those cards had been left at Mrs. Templar's door, and of those few some bore the names of persons who had in the last "season" quitted their carriages to enter her hall. Nettine herself was slow to observe the change. It was not till her husband had several times asked such questions as these—"Did you know the Merediths had returned?" "I find that Miss Mackenzie Browne has been come back some days!" "Have the Hautons left cards?"—that she perceived something, probably not much, but *something* of her Easter Tuesday indiscretion had transpired. She shrugged her white shoulders. She was unaffectedly indifferent to the matter. And, mind you, I do not mention her indifference as a merit or a distinction, but the reverse. She was, I am sorry to say, as indifferent to the disapproval of the persons whose good opinion she should have valued, as to the censure of

those whom we could forgive her for regarding with contempt.

Things after Montresor's arrival improved. It was difficult, without any very distinct, producible reason, to cut a lady for whom Colonel Montresor evinced a very high esteem and regard, and with whom the lady's own husband appeared to find no fault. In the course, therefore, of a few days, Miss Mackenzie Browne made her visit, the Hautons left their cards, and the Merediths sent an invitation to one of the dinners they were giving in honour of Sir Walter and Lady Wing. When, a little farther on than these, moreover, Nettine had appeared at the table, in Sydney Place, of the Earl and Countess of Featherstone, all danger of her exclusion from the gaieties of the approaching "season" was at an end. This, however, is a little anticipating.

I regret to say that Mrs. Templar had not of late been very regular in her attendance at the Sunday services in St. Margaret's Chapel.

Sometimes a headache after the Theatre, sometimes a damp or a foggy morning, would be offered by her in excuse for not accompanying her husband. On the particular Sunday of which I write, she had both these excuses to offer. The representation on the evening before of the greater part of two operas for the benefit of a favourite singer from London, had only ended with midnight, and the Crescent, seen from a late breakfast table, presented a wet pavement to her eyes. Mr. Templar, then, set forth alone, and his wife retired with a novel to her sofa.

Perhaps it was not a very clever, or even a very interesting, novel. She ceased after a while to turn its leaves, and I think, while it reposed on the rich folds of her dress, she was speculating a little in regard to the several churches that might be supposed to compete for the attendance of the newly arrived Lord and Lady Featherstone. Bathwick was, she supposed, their parish church; but, then, there were Laura Chapel and the

Abbey at no great distance, and many persons from Sydney Place found their way to the Octagon, though the now Bishop of P—— had not then begun, I think, to preach there. They had not—this Lord and Lady Featherstone—shown themselves at the Theatre on the previous night, as it had been rather expected they would do, and were meaning perhaps to be mysterious. Nettine shrugged her shoulders as she returned to her novel. But that Montresor was acquainted with them, she would not have given them a second thought.

Subsequently, when the sun shone quite brightly, she was rather sorry she had not herself attended church; and as the steps and voices indicating the conclusion of the morning service began to be heard beneath her windows, she quitted her novel to look out.

Mr. Templar *alone* was approaching his own door, but after he had entered it his wife still remained at the window. She saw, as

may be imagined, several persons whom she knew. There was Miss Mackenzie Browne (her footman behind her carrying her books) in seemingly earnest conversation with Colonel and Mrs. Hauton, and presently joined by the handsome Dr. —, who not unfrequently attended her home from church. There was Pretty Percival permitting himself to be talked to by Miss Rose Meredith's mamma; there was the lovely Lady Wing exhibiting in a single turn before luncheon, on the arm of an already bored looking husband, the white bonnet and velvet pelisse of a bride of eight weeks; but there was *not* Montresor. He had, Nettine vexedly thought, gone to see Lord and Lady Featherstone after church. Perhaps on the first Sunday after their arrival this might be a proper thing to do, but—and she remembered how little she would like to lose the turn on the Crescent it had been his custom to take with herself—on future Sundays it would be quite unnecessary, and, considering the distance between the

Crescent and Sydney Place, both inconvenient and improbable.

It was in withdrawing her eyes from the Brock Street end of the Crescent that she found herself returning the bow of Montresor, who was one of three persons walking slowly past under her window from the opposite direction. A very sweet face was lifted nearly at the same moment. It was the sweet face, moreover, of a young and beautiful woman, whose height and carriage were elegant, and with whose toilette the eye of Nettine—sufficiently disposed to severe criticism—could find no fault. She reddened—she whom we have always seen so pale—if the manner of a child whose toy or whose tart has just been snatched out of its hand; and, having remained at the window till she could no longer have any reasonable expectation of the return of Montresor with or without the persons he accompanied, she sat down on the sofa, and let fall a shower of tears.

“Were the people you were walking with Lord and Lady Featherstone?” she asked, when, later in the day, about four o’clock, Montresor called.

“Lady Featherstone, and Lord Featherstone’s nephew, Mr. Vaughan.”

“She looks quite young.”

“Wonderfully so!” and Montresor spoke in quite a pleased way, and sat down by Mrs. Templar’s side.

“Do you admire,” said the latter, “such blue eyes?”

“I admire Lady Featherstone’s eyes?”

“And light hair?”

“Could you see so much from the window? Yes, I admire it. In its way it is almost as wonderful hair as your own.”

“Is it *her* own?”

“Every hair of it.”

“At thirty-five!”

“Even at thirty-five. Hair of that colour, delicate as it looks, is almost imperishable.”

“She must be very much made up, however, to appear so young.”

“Thirty-five is not old.”

“I shall not like her.”

“I shall be very sorry for *that!*” Montresor answered, gravely.

“Nevertheless, I shall not like her.”

“You were not at Church this morning?”

“No. The Theatre last night tired me to death.”

“Yet the music was good.”

I have no doubt Mrs. Templar was about to express an opinion that it was detestable. Mr. Templar, however, entered the room, and she turned her face in the opposite direction, and said very little more.

Nay, even while Montresor still sat there, conversing with her husband, she ascended to her own apartment, and by the light of the fire walked in an eccentric sort of way about the room. At thirty-five—to possess such eyes—and such hair, and, in short, to be still

young!—Nettine had so completely deceived herself that she began to feel as if some one else had deceived her. Not Montresor. That kiss, that unhappy kiss, of his that was never absent from her lips, had for her all the force of a promise, of an oath. With Lady Featherstone the offence lay,—the falsehood—the incongruity. Why should she be at once old and young? thirty-five and still beautiful? a young woman and an old friend? Nettine hated her.

She sat down before the fire, and felt a little as she had done on that Easter Tuesday morning, when Montresor had said, “And you are still a child.” The face—the calm, sweet, beautiful face—that filled her mind’s eye, repressed and constrained her, as Montresor’s had done, and in the same manner. That is, it influenced only to a certain depth. Below this, the wild impulses of her soul were surging, and her will, and her purpose rolled steadily on to the Future, as some strong river to the sea. But ever on the surface of

the waters shone, like a summer moon, that sweet, beautiful face. She thought she could have loved it, if it had never shone on Montresor. But it had shone on him—it did shine on him; and she, it seemed, had not attained the womanly stature to intercept its light; and so she hated it. At this point she sprang up and tore round the room. “I am jealous of her!” she exclaimed, “I am jealous of her!”

And she felt the same when she sat at Lady Featherstone's table (even though the voice of Montresor was in her ears) and veiled her eyes from the radiance, intolerable to her in its serenity and kindness, of the Countess's face. “I am jealous of her!” she said, when she directed those eyes into her own heart; and she looked the same thing when she sought to read the heart of Montresor.

“Who was Lady Featherstone?” she inquired of him one evening. “Was she anybody?”

“She was Miss Verity,” he replied, and in

the rather grave way that had, more than once, in regard to Lady Featherstone, stung Nettine.

“Oh! a Miss. It, too, was a *mariage de convenance*, then, I suppose?”

Montresor did not, for a moment or two, answer, but looked down. Then he said—

“Lady Featherstone was engaged to Lord Featherstone when he had no expectations of coming to the title. It was on her part a marriage wholly of affection. Will you take some refreshment?”

“No,” she replied, “I am going home.”

And they parted, so to speak, without another word. I do not mean this literally. Montresor said, “It is wet,” and “Are you well wrapped up?” And she replied that she was, and wished him, coldly, “Good-night.” But not a word was spoken on either side that could soften the misery of the passion of tears to which Nettine gave way when she reached her own drawing-room.

“Oh, how I hate her!” she exclaimed,

over and over again, as she threw herself on one after another of the several couches of the luxuriously-furnished apartment, as she plunged her face amidst their cushions, and as she paced round the floor, all the looking-glasses reflecting in succession her streaming eyes, flushed cheeks, and disordered toilette. "How I hate her!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN ON THE STAIRS.

THE dislike of Lady Featherstone, entertained by Mrs. Templar, was fully equalled by the dislike of Mrs. Templar entertained by the Earl. There are men who readily see beauty in every woman's face; and there are men who can see no beauty in any but such as are beautiful for them. Lord Featherstone was of the number of those last named. On one evening at the theatre he carefully wiped and adjusted his opera glasses, and directed them

to the alabaster-like face, and large, dark, liquid eyes of a young lady in an opposite box—a young lady whose velvet robe and diamond circlet, and cloak bound with sables, indicated, notwithstanding her youth, a married position. The Earl deliberately, as I have said, directed his opera glass to Mrs. Templar's face; but while he maintained it in this direction, it happened that Colonel Montesor entered her box, and the large, dark, liquid eyes turned themselves on their visitor. My lord did not instantly withdraw his gaze—not perhaps for a minute; but, once withdrawn, it never again, throughout the night, took the same direction; and afterwards, on being asked if he admired Mrs. Templar, he said, emphatically, “No.” However, when, some three weeks further on, Mr. Paul Vaughan thought fit to go into raptures about her complexion, her eyes, and her voice, the Earl—it was at dinner—bent a little over his plate, and offered no adverse opinion.

I feel sure that Montresor beheld with considerable regret the attentions of this Mr. Paul Vaughan to the young and beautiful Mrs. Templar begin to supersede those on the part of "Pretty Percival" that had occasioned him hardly more than a moment's uneasiness. In desiring for Nettine the friendship of the Countess of Featherstone, he certainly had not, by any means, wished to promote an intimacy between the first-mentioned lady and the nephew of the earl. However little he might himself admire this presumptive heir to hereditary legislation, it was very present to his mind that his own daughter, a young lady highly born and bred, and most carefully educated and conventionalized, had not been insensible to his attractions; and was Nettine, ill born, ill bred, uneducated, and unconventionalized, to be supposed more fastidious? How shall we excuse her perversity in the matter? for *we* do not suppose she is going to take an infatuation for this second-rate Cupidon. How shall we hear with any

patience that, while under the very eye of the man she loved, she treated the graceful, kindly-meant attentions of the woman that man valued, with marked coldness, even with *brusquerie*; she, under the same eye, would pass hours of an evening in waltzing with Mr. Paul Vaughan, or in a conspicuously-retired corner of the ball-room by his side? How shall I admit that, detecting the anxiety in Colonel Montresor's regards, she lowered her own eyes with a thrill, an agony, of joy at her heart; and lifted them again—not to his face, with thankfulness for his solicitude, but to that of Mr. Paul Vaughan? Young ladies, I could not admit it, if Nettine were designed for a heroine. But I do not construct heroines. I admit, it, therefore; and leave the explanation of it to you.

And, after a little, it was not in a ball-room only that Mr. Paul Vaughan might be seen by Mrs. Templar's side. He was sometimes there in her own drawing-room; and an hour's endurance of his stupidity—for he

was stupid—was repaid to Nettine by the pain she discovered in the voice of Colonel Montresor in finding them together.

One day Montresor asked, averting his eyes—

“Had Mr. Vaughan been long here when I came in?”

And Nettine replied—

“Yes. It is very kind of him. I am so much alone.”

Another day he said to her, and Mr. Vaughan was present—

“Mrs. Templar, you are not enough in the air. You do not drive as much as you used to do.”

And she answered—

“One gets tired of driving. Mr. Vaughan is persuading me that I should like to ride. He is good enough to say he will—if Mr. Templar buys me a horse—ride with me.”

An evening or two after, they met at a party.

“And how about the horse, Mrs. Templar?”
Montresor said.

“Oh! I believe I shall have one. Why?”

“Because,” he replied a little seriously, “I do not think riding will be good for you.”

Nevertheless, he within the week encountered her and Mr. Paul Vaughan on horseback in the park, and the regret in his face sent Nettine home happier than she had lately been, for the evening.

On the occasion of another of Mr. Paul Vaughan's visits, Caroline Datchet met him as she was ascending the stairs, and hurried into the presence of the lady of the house with a rather heightened complexion, and eyes of consternation not unmixed with anger.

“My dear Nettine—what an audacious-looking man!—the man I met on the stairs! But is he a friend of yours?”

“He is.”

“Oh! of course, then, I have nothing to say—”

"Then," Nettine replied drily, "*say nothing.*"

I must tell you that our old acquaintance Caroline was now in a position to resent audacious looks from strangers. She was engaged to Mr. Florian, and had come to give Mrs. Templar the intelligence.

"To the Master of Ravenswood," said Nettine, not at all intending an impertinence, but rather in the tone of a person who gains time to recover from surprise, or arrange thoughts.

"To the Master of Ravenswood," Caroline replied with a little laugh. "I do not in the least mind your calling him so, because, you see, the Master of Ravenswood was such a very nice person. I think it a compliment, in fact. You do not congratulate me, Nettine."

"I will do so, if you wish it. In your place I should not myself want to be congratulated. I do not understand you."

"You mean," said Caroline, in a changed tone, and growing a little pale, "because of Rolleston?"

"I mean because of Rolleston."

"You see that could never be, now."

"What could never be?"

"I could never marry Rolleston."

"Is that," said Nettine, presently averting her eyes, "a reason for marrying somebody else?"

"Well—yes! I think so. I should not be happy to be always single."

"Shall you be happy in marrying Mr. Florian?"

"Nettine," said Caroline, after a thoughtful, painful pause of several moments, "when I was a very little creature they took me to the theatre. I was so little that I was put to bed at my usual hour, and waked up again about nine o'clock or so—it seemed to me the middle of the night—and dressed, and made smart, and carried by the nurse to mamma's box in time for the second piece, which must have been, I fancy, a sort of extravaganza, spectacle, or something of the kind, for children. I quite remember the name; it was

called 'Cherry and Fair Star.' I imagine the scenery must have been very lovely. I recall a forest with figures moving in the depth of it. Then I did not go to the theatre again for years. The hour, too, was an unusual one for me to be awake at. At any rate, from whatever cause, that night is a night out of, and apart from, all the rest of my life. I cannot describe, faintly even—I cannot describe at all—the sort of sensation with which I remember it. No other play ever recalls that extravaganza to my mind. Yet I go to other plays, and I even smile and weep at them. Well! Rolleston—*Do* you at all understand me?"

"Not," replied Mrs. Templar, "in the least. I simply understand that you mean to marry Mr. Florian. Do you mean to be happy?"

"Certainly! or do you believe I would marry him? You see he is devoted to me, and I shall make him happy—which is always something. Then I shall have duties;—at home I have none. There will be housekeep-

ing, and friends, and, I hope, some dear little children; and his *voice*, you know, it must always be a treat to hear. Oh, yes! I shall be happy. Only it will not be an extravaganza. I mean it will not be *the* extravaganza."

"How," asked Nettine, after a little pause, "is Mrs. Arnold?"

"Mamma," Caroline replied, "is well. She is not bright, however. Home is not what you remember it—not what it used to be. She will be happier, I think, when this has taken place. There must be time for her to get to like the idea; and then, I think, all will be well again."

"But why be in a hurry?"

"Well,—I do not see the good of waiting."

"What," asked Mrs. Templar, "shall my wedding present to you be? A piano?"

"My dear Nettine, how good! Ten thousand thanks! but I am to have, mamma says, the one that was yours. And Edgar has one of his own."

"Then would you like something for your

house, or for yourself? I will decide for you. My wedding present shall be a pair of diamond earrings and a clock for your chimney-piece. So tell your other friends to give you something else."

"Am I likely," exclaimed Caroline in a transport, "to have another friend so generous? Papa will be generous," she added, with a little accent of tender compunction, "but he cannot, you know, be munificent. And now, Nettine, before I go, who was the handsome gentleman on the stairs?"

Widely and coldly Mrs. Templar opened her eyes on her questioner, and the tone in which she replied "Mr. Paul Vaughan," was as dry a one as can well be imagined.

"But does he often come to see you?"

"He does. Why do you ask?"

"Because, because—Oh, Nettine! you will not be angry,—but *you* must not have an extravaganza."

Nettine, with her haughty eyes still on her

unlucky visitor, made a step forward, and rang the bell. Caroline, it is true, had risen; yet, in closing the drawing-room door after her, she felt herself dismissed.

CHAPTER IV.

A DARK GREEN BROUGHAM.

“WHAT do you think of that woman?” asked one of two gentlemen who occupied a back bench in the stage box on the right of the theatre. The eyes of both were fixed at the same moment on the same lady, so there was no need to particularise.

“I am making up my mind!” was the reply.

“Perhaps *that* will assist you.”

That, was the entrance into the box under observation, of no less a personage than the

Earl of Featherstone, and the reception of him by the lady to whom the two gentlemen's eyes were directed.

“*That* has done so. Such a mouth and teeth would redeem a worse face. Is the man in the corner the husband?”

“The husband. Something of a rough, as you perceive.”

The lady about whom and whose the above remarks were one evening made, was the invariable occupant of a plain but perfectly appointed dark green brougham, to be seen almost daily passing through the park on its way from the town to one of the houses on the Weston Road. Nothing could be quieter than this brougham; yet it was to be met with during the visiting hours of the afternoon before the doors of the gayest people in Bath. Nothing could be more the reverse of “fast” than the appearance of the lady, yet whenever you met a “faster” or more fashionable-looking man than usual, driving or riding in the direction of the

Weston Road, you might be pretty sure that a card of his would be left at her gate. As for my Lord Featherstone, once or twice a week, but *once* at the very least, a fine chestnut mare, lately purchased by him from the master of the dark green brougham, was pacing up and down outside the wall that enclosed the house and terrace and small lawn and marble fountain a good deal too large for the lawn, belonging to her former owner, my lord himself having been admitted at a door giving access to a covered way that led straight up to the drawing-room window. At this window, the reader, following the Earl's footsteps, may behold the lady herself whom, in an evening toilette and coiffure of flowers, he is not expected to have recognised. Now, however, in beholding by daylight her light eyelashes and long reddish ringlets and white throat and high well-made morning dress, and especially in hearing the particular consideration with which, even while shaking hands with his lordship, she inquires after "Ruper-

ta," his memory will serve him. Yes! in the position she long coveted, the position opened to her at last by the death of the woman she detested and who detested her, he (the reader) may take off his hat to Mrs. Spender (of Heathfield), *née* Miss Eliza Smith.

It is simply to give him the opportunity of paying this compliment to an old acquaintance that he has been permitted to follow Lord Featherstone. There is nothing sensational to come of it. True, my lord spends half an hour, sometimes nearer a whole one, once or twice a week, in Mrs. Spender's drawing-room—and this though she is neither beautiful nor witty, nor, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, coquette; yet she is held irreproachable. Society has accorded her its good opinion. It speaks of her as the judicious wife of a difficult sort of husband: as a person who must have a good deal to contend with, and who does not trouble IT with her contentions. It admires her kindness to her little step-son, whose velvet cap is often to be seen at a win-

dow of the dark green brougham ; and it regards it as quite natural, indeed creditable to all parties, that Lord and Lady Featherstone, to whom the mother of the little stepson was nearly related, should value and show attention to Mrs. Spender (of Heathfield) for the same cause. Mrs. Spender (of Heathfield) is one of the many persons of whom Nettine, in her ignorance or her indifference, has not made a friend. Quite the reverse ! I forget the exact circumstances under which the two ladies met, but they were such as rendered it proper for Mrs. Templar to call on Mrs. Spender, and Mrs. Templar had omitted to do so. This had not, you will easily conceive, tended to soften the verdict of Lord Featherstone in regard to the younger and last-mentioned lady. It may not, perhaps, be very generous of a man to be the enemy of a woman, even under any little real or fancied provocation. Yet most of us know there *are* men capable of such enmity ; and the provocation given by Nettine was undoubted. She had not her-

self shown any admiration of Lord Featherstone, and she had affronted the lady who had discovered a better taste.

The winter, however, was continually advancing; and, after a while, I do not know that beyond the measure in which all enmity may be injurious, the enmity of Lord Featherstone was likely to injure Nettine. Unpleasant things began to be *looked* about the house in Sydney Place. To be an Earl is—as it ought to be—always something; nay, much. Titles represent—do they not?—high deeds. Not always, it is true, the deeds of those who bear them; but these last, if unhappily not honourable in themselves, are, at least, as ambassadors from honourable courts; and as such we cheerfully uncover our heads—I am speaking for their fellow-men—before them. To be an Earl, then, is much. Nevertheless, after a while, people began to look unpleasant things about the Earl of Featherstone. A French nobleman introduced by him had won from several persons large sums,

for a place like Bath, of money. One of these large winnings had been spoken of as a "transaction," and, when the French nobleman had taken his departure, it commenced moreover, to be spoken of as a "transaction," by which the Earl had not profited as much as he had perhaps designed to do. Besides this, other and stranger, if less discreditable, rumours began to be floating about.

I wonder if there is still in Walcot Buildings a pork-butcher's shop which for particular reasons I remember! On a bitter February night the comely wife who presided at his counter had just handed a little packet of change to a departing customer, when a smart footman in powder and livery made a couple of steps into the shop.

"I was to call," he said, "about some sausages for Sydney Place that haven't been sent."

"They shall be sent directly, sir," the woman replied. "Would you tell Mrs. Chappell if the boy isn't in in a minute, my son

will step down with them. I can't think how it happened—they quite went out of my head."

"All right!" the smart footman said; and, quitting the shop, found the female customer who had passed him the minute before, lingering, with eyes turned towards him, a few paces further on. She was a genteelly-dressed woman, and very large and black her eyes looked in the light of the street lamp close by.

"A cold night, ma'am," said he of the powder and livery.

And the woman replied "Very cold!" and began to walk forward in the same direction as himself. "One need walk fast to keep oneself warm. If you live at—Sydney Place, you have not far to go."

"No, ma'am. Sydney Place it is."

"We hear something of Lord Featherstone at Mr. Templar's, in the Crescent, where I am housekeeper. Mr. Vaughan visits my lady."

"Oh! Mr. Vaughan. I des'say."

"He is a handsome young gentleman," the woman said, "and, we hear, is likely to be the heir. Rank is a fine thing."

"Aye, ain't it?"

"Money though is a better. And it is said that's not so plenty with Lord Featherstone."

"Don't know, indeed. We've seen no particklar want of it."

"It must be a great grief, I should suppose, to your lord and lady to have no child of their own to come to the title."

"Can't say. I havn't seen them a crying about it."

"And especially if, as people say, his lordship is kept out of money, owing to having no son to put his name to a bit of paper."

"May be," said Jeames, "a daughter would do as well."

"If he had one with a name. But he hasn't."

"Don't take your oath of that."

The woman stopped, and her black eyes flashed upon her companion's face. She wore

a lace veil, the scalloped edge of which overhung the front of her bonnet, and rendered her other features a little doubtful. But there was no mistake about her eyes.

"What do you mean?" she asked. And the footman said he had meant nothing in particular.

"Do you speak like that," she said sternly, "without meaning? Why should I take an oath about it, or," she added, "why shouldn't I. What name can belong to any daughter of my Lord Featherstone?"

"'Twas," said the rather startled Jeames, "my lady's daughter as I meant."

"Your lady's?"

The woman had again walked forward, and continued to do so, though more slowly than at first, and she and her companion were now near the turning to the Cleveland Bridge. "Your lady's!" she repeated.

Once more the regards Jeames found so singular sought his face, and compelled him to attempt his own vindication. They told

him, I think, that only a fool spoke without meaning, and they asked him, was *he* a fool? He felt bound, therefore, to show that he was *not* a fool, and that he had *not* spoken without meaning.

“ You wouldn't think, now, to look at her,” he observed awkwardly, “ there was anything queer about my lady ?”

“ Or if I did,” replied the woman, “ queer things don't result in daughters with names. Man ! such daughters must be born in marriage.”

“ Aye !” he retorted with greater readiness than he had hitherto displayed. “ But there are such queer things as queer marriages.”

“ And do they say,” the woman asked, after a pause, “ that Lady Featherstone's was a queer marriage ?”

“ Perhaps,” answered the footman, with a too late reticence, a too late compunction, “ perhaps they do and perhaps they don't. Folks will talk ; but whether they talk right

or whether they talk wrong, is neither here nor there."

"Very true; and, as you say, folks will talk. Your way now lies over the bridge, and mine straight on. I am not often in this direction, but I daresay you sometimes visit the Crescent?"

"Well, he couldn't say he had any particular acquaintance there at present. It was a situation he greatly admired."

"Then," the woman replied, "you no doubt sometimes find yourself there. And if any night about this time you feel disposed to call in to supper in a quiet way, I shall be very happy to see you, and to introduce you to Mrs. Templar's pretty French maid, Mademoiselle Pauline."

Jeames intimated that he should avail himself, though present company, he said, would be his object; and he was not too bashful to inquire who he was to ask for?

“For Mrs. Davis, the housekeeper,” she told him.

And long after he in powder and plush had devoured his share of the sausages duly forwarded to Sydney Place, the “housekeeper” was still walking slowly homewards; slowly, almost pausing at intervals, and thinking—thinking.

CHAPTER V.

THE PERSON FROM MRS. TEMPLAR'S.

IN the preceding chapter I have mentioned February. Therefore it had, you see, arrived; and with it that inexorable meeting of Parliament that does but little at the first to improve the cheerfulness of London, while it so often carries gloom and disappointment into the gaieties of the country. In a town like Bath, it made as little difference as can well be imagined. The most important was

it lessened the leisure for scandal, and supplied a topic of conversation to the Clubs.

This meeting of Parliament did a little more. It compelled persons who had not lost their money at whist, or piquet, or billiards, or hazard, and who heard with much real pain rumours damaging to the reputation of a nobleman whom they wished to respect, to astonish themselves at the very different estimation in which his lordship was commencing to be held by the public journals of that day. He had spoken more than once, more than twice, on subjects of considerable importance, and had spoken well, and had been heard each time with increasing attention. It was most unfortunate for Lord Featherstone that the moment of discovering an ability he had not earlier known himself to possess—the moment in which he saw a way to honourable distinction and to power open to him, was likewise the moment when he beheld the money difficulties that had been gathering for years, on the point of com-

binning together against him in a manner that only something like a miracle could enable him to resist. This miracle was perhaps, however, at hand.

A clever lawyer into whose possession papers required in the arrangement of some business matter had temporarily passed, had taken this critical moment to discover that the proved existence of any legitimate child of the Earl, of the age that the unfortunate daughter of Lady Featherstone would, if living, have by this time attained, might possibly put him in possession of a very large sum of money, and would certainly give him for the next three years an income competent to provide even a nobleman's necessaries of life.

You may suppose the spur this would be, and especially at such a juncture, to my lord's efforts to trace out this singularly disposed of child. You may imagine that my lord's time in London was not devoted exclusively to politics; but that the recovery of a daughter

whose mere existence had become so important, was more or less engaging his thoughts and influencing his actions during almost every hour of the day.

It was on one of the last evenings of the month that Lord Featherstone, having arrived in Sydney Place from town, at an hour later than that of the ordinary dinner, had, after coffee and an unusually protracted conference with her ladyship in the drawing-room, descended to the library to read and answer the unforwarded letters that had accumulated there in his absence.

A quarter of an hour later than this a servant, on opening the door of the drawing-room to deliver a message, found the Countess in what seemed to him an unusual attitude, and with eyes that did not appear in the first moment to comprehend the sense of what he said; her little white dog was on the rug asleep before the fire, yet her gesture was the gesture of one who folds some pet animal in her arms. This was but her first aspect,

however. Almost immediately she altered her position, and inquired of the servant what he wanted.

"The person from Mrs. Templar's, my lady," he repeated, "has called about the lady's maid's place."

"Ask her to walk in."

By the time she did so, the Countess was quite her usual self, and returned the salutation of the woman we have heard call herself "Mrs. Davis" with a gentle dignity all her own.

"I regret," her ladyship said, "having given you the trouble to come. I believe I have seen a person who will suit me,—a younger person, and an Englishwoman."

"I," replied the woman, "am English. I have resided many years in France; I am as a Parisian, but my birth is English."

Lady Featherstone remained a minute thoughtful. At the end of that time she said a little coldly—

"I believe I am suited."

Whether the woman doubted this, whether she imagined she saw a probability of succeeding through perseverance—she did persevere.

“Your ladyship gave me some hopes that I might suit you ; I feel great confidence that I could do so. I should use every endeavour ; and, being almost as much French and German as English, I could hope to be useful if your ladyship should travel. Your ladyship does not always reside in England?”

“The person I have seen,” Lady Featherstone repeated, “is younger.”

“I am thirty-seven.”

“I took you to be more. The person I have seen, however, is quite a young person, and I think I shall prefer it.”

“If your ladyship would permit me to enter on a month’s trial—”

“By no means ; I am very averse to change, and I believe you would not suit me. I should only be injuring you ; I regret you have had the trouble of calling.”

The woman looked down, paused, made a

sort of reluctant step or two in the direction of the door; then turned and rivetted her eyes on Lady Featherstone in a manner that the latter felt to be unpleasant. Indeed, it brought a faint colour into her pale cheek.

“I entreat your ladyship,” the woman said, “to reconsider your decision.”

“I have quite decided; I am sorry. Good evening.”

The woman now departed, and the Countess sank back in her chair. Agitated for a few moments by a pertinacity she had not expected, and by the look and tone—at the last—of the person who had just quitted her, she omitted to ring the bell, and that person descended the brightly lighted stairs without encountering a servant. The front door was before her at the end of the hall, and she could, of course, have let herself out without assistance. Instead of doing this, however, she paused at the door of a room on the ground floor. It was a very little open, and a light was burning within.

For some seconds the woman bent towards it without catching a sound. At last a slight rustle reached her ear. She paused perhaps a quarter of a minute longer—every vibration of a clock on the staircase making itself heard in the profound silence—and then, pushing the door a little further open, and without rousing Lord Featherstone, whose eyes were bent upon letters on the table before him, she entered the apartment.

It was in the act of reclosing the door that she made the slight noise at which his lordship looked up.

“What the d——l!” he exclaimed.

She did reclose it, nevertheless, and then turned round and confronted him.

“Ay!” she said, “What the d——l!”

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LIBRARY.

THE expression of Lord Featherstone's face, in uttering the oath with which he received his unexpected visitor, had been one of unmixed, unmitigated surprise. A sort of indignant disgust, however, succeeded to this, on the distinct approach of the woman in the direction of a chair, to which no gesture of his had invited her. Undaunted, however, she seated herself on this chair; and as she did so, the Earl rose quietly from his own, and

took up his position on the hearth-rug in front of the fire, whence he sternly and calmly surveyed her.

He beheld a woman who looked forty years of age, and who possessed a handsome and what might have once been an attractive face. The features, though large, were of a fine type ; the eyes were brilliant ones ; the hair, dark at a distance, but in which the nearer approach to the lamp revealed more grey than the woman's age seemed to warrant, was thick, and grew low upon the forehead ; and the figure, to which this face belonged, was an indisputably good one. Her gown—and of such details the glance of Lord Featherstone did not refuse to become cognizant—was a plain but handsome black silk, sufficiently devoid of newness to look like ordinary wear ; a velvet mantle also black, and of suitable character ; well-fitting gloves ; a straw bonnet quietly trimmed with a violet coloured ribbon ; and a black lace veil.

“Where,” asked his lordship, when he had

sufficiently taken note of the above, "do you come from?"

"You possibly believe," replied the woman, who had been making her survey also, "that you have some right to inquire."

The Earl's eyes filled with a sort of haughty anger in meeting her resolute stare—a stare of unsoftened insolence, and, so to speak, recollection. Subsequently he dropped them to the toe of his well made, well varnished boot, and a smile, not particularly pleasant to look at, began to make itself seen in the muscles around his mouth.

"You believe," repeated the woman, "that you have a right to enquire?"

"The answer!" Lord Featherstone replied sternly, "is in your own choice. I can conceive you may prefer not to make one. Do you come here without a motive?"

"I came here to offer myself as lady's maid to your Countess."

"Who has naturally declined to engage you."

“Naturally. Whether as wisely as naturally remains to be proved. I sought in the first instance your wife; in the second yourself; and you should be able to form some conception of my motive in doing so.”

“I can conceive one,” replied the Earl, with a coldness of look and voice such as it is almost impossible sufficiently to imagine. “I cannot form the faintest conception of any other.”

“Man! you have no heart—that I know; you have—it is to be hoped—no soul. But you have interests, and hopes, and fears. Especially at this moment, you have interests and hopes and fears. Are you certain that I have no concern with these?”

“Mathematically certain of it.”

“You are a fool! It is not the first time I have told you so. I was right then, and I am right now. I say you are a fool,—a fool who hath said in his heart—‘There is no justice, no retribution, no revenge!’—and there are all three. You ask where I come from?”

Ay! where? Not from the grave; there is nothing," she said with a detestable laugh, "ghostly about me. Not from the dung-hill either; the perfume, for example, on this pocket-handkerchief was purchased by myself at Cologne. What! I have a silk gown on my back, and shoes to my feet, and a watch at my side; and my face is not painted, nor my lips steeped in gin! And for how much of this have I to thank you? For how much of it? And because I have not you to thank, you regard me as if I had gathered myself together from the four elements. You thought you had done with me, and I repeat you are a fool not to have known me better. Do you, and such as you, believe that all the misery you scatter broadcast becomes annihilated, or sinks down for ever into the bowels of the earth? Do you believe that all the refuse from your table cast out into the dark corners beyond your garden wall, and left there to rot unburied, unpurified, unremembered, unremoved—shall exhale no avenging poison

that shall reach yourself! Your sin will find you out."

"Do you quote scripture, woman?"

"I quote truth," replied the woman, with increasing excitement, "logical, philosophical, eternal truth—find it where I may. If I believe in no divine laws, I believe in a law of cause and effect. Neither in the scriptures nor out of the scriptures do men gather figs off thistles. Never was there a more heartless seduction than that of myself. Granted I was vain, weak, disobedient, treacherous—granted all this, it leaves your crime the less excuse. For you knew what I was. You were years beyond your age, and judged me rightly,—rightly, as you judged my poor sister wrongly. And right and wrong as you were, you made your cruel sport of us—of her heart—of my soul. You made as very sport of us as I have seen younger ruffians make on an idle winter night of a poor cat, hunting it into some blind alley, or to some water's edge, and leav-

ing it there crippled and broken and battered, and without so much as turning a head to see if the creature were out of its pain."

I think in most altercations it is the person who speaks least that preserves the advantage. It was so with my Lord Featherstone. Whatever we may be thinking of him, whatever he may have been thinking of himself, his cold silence, his controlled eye, the scorn repressed to some extent, as by the presence of a woman, yet never leaving his lips, invested him with something of such an outward and unreal dignity as he might have derived from his Peer's robes; while his former victim, eloquent and gesticulating, descended with every word. It seemed that in concluding the last passionate sentences recorded, she became aware of this. She paused abruptly, and regarded the Earl, whose eyes affected to contemplate the ceiling, and round whose handsome mouth a smile always played. A singular paleness crept across her face underneath, so to speak,

the swarthy skin of its outer skin, in regarding him; and almost for the first time she suffered her eyelids to fall; while one gloved hand—a slender and feminine one—sought, and remained near her heart. When she spoke again it was in a changed and controlled tone and manner.

“My lord!” she said, “I wish you a good evening. Only again, before I quit this room, I ask is there one human creature of whose fate you wish to enquire at my hands?”

The Earl's eyes filled with an almost livid anger, as directing them for a single moment towards her, he answered in a louder voice than he had yet used—

“No.”

There was perhaps a quarter of a minute's silence. “If,” the woman said at last, “there be a God, you have rejected his mercy this night,—rejected it for you and yours. If there be not, you have simply thrown away the best chance your life has offered. Good evening!”

Neither word or look did the Earl vouchsafe her, and she quitted the room as noiselessly as she had entered it; closing, too, in due time the street door with so little sound, that it would hardly have reached the ear of a less attentive listener than the man she had left. He heard it, and after an interval of but a few seconds, crossed the apartment lightly, and ascended the staircase to the drawing-room. Not to enter it, however; he merely opened the door and asked of his lady, who still occupied the *fauteuil* in which he had left her—

“What woman had you with you here?”

“A person,” her ladyship replied, “offering to take the place of Rosalie.”

“She came recommended, of course?”

“I understood her to say she could be highly recommended; but as I did not think she would suit me, I made no enquiries. She is living at present with Mrs. Templar.”

“An unquestionable recommendation!” observed my lord, and shut the door and went down stairs.

We must return with him for two minutes to the library. It scarcely took him that time to write, fold, and seal a note, which the servant, summoned by the library bell, took from the table.

“Let that go immediately to Mr. —, to his own house. Take it yourself, and wait for an answer.”

Mr. — was the Earl's lawyer.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHAPERONE.

It was with much pain, as I have already intimated, that Colonel Montresor beheld the more and more conspicuous reception by Mrs. Templar of the attentions offered her by the nephew of Lord Featherstone. You will not believe for a moment that mortification had any place in this regret. Had Montresor thought chiefly of himself, he could not but have found in the indiscretion of Nettine relief from a certain embarrassment. He was

not, however, thinking of himself, and what he saw and what he heard was occasioning him vexation, indeed, but not exactly the sort of vexation that she would have cared to inflict.

His pain, nevertheless, exceeded his surprise. That a mere girl, untrained—for aught he knew ill-trained—passionate and wayward as Nettine, and unsatisfied with her own home, should easily, after a few disappointing months, transfer her so-called affection from himself to a young handsome man, with only too much leisure and disposition to place himself at her feet, appeared to Montresor natural. But it was not for that reason the less to be deplored.

I am sure that the matter occasioned him some anxious, as well as regretful, moments. It was not in the first of these he could convince himself that while powerless for good he might not be equally so for evil; that the lady's temper was a difficult one and insufficiently understood by him, and that any

active treatment of the case might only assist it to declare itself. He decided, then, that his conduct to her should suffer no alteration, and became only more assiduous in his efforts to attract her into the society of Lady Featherstone. These efforts were, I am bound to say, ineffectual. Nettine never accepted a civility from Lady Featherstone otherwise than ungraciously, and very seldom accepted one at all.

And amidst all this the gaiety of Bath went on increasing. It is true, it was Lent; but five-and-twenty years or so ago, only the very High Church (the very low church would, of course, be out of the question in such a matter) abstained from the balls that took place during that now more gravely observed season. It was to these gaieties, rather than to any better influence, that Montresor had come to trust for the safety of Mrs. Templar during the remaining weeks of Mr Paul Vaughan's stay in Bath. He (Montresor) was well pleased to see her vary

what he supposed her sentimental conversations with Mr. Vaughan, by waltzes with that ineffable dancer, "Pretty Percival," and that unreclaimed flirt, Sir Walter Wing. It was something, he argued, that those large, lustrous eyes should be able to look forward with expectation of pleasure, even to a ball. How could he know that when those eyes were looking most lustrous, it was because Lady Featherstone was admiring them while leaning on his arm? How could he know that when the possessor of those eyes flew round the room in her most inimitable manner, the swiftness of the movement was accelerated by intolerable anger that Lady Featherstone and he were sitting still? Well, some men might perhaps have known it. I cannot say; I can only say that Montresor did not know it, and I expect you to believe me.

It happened that on a bright day in the beginning of March, the carriage of Mr. Templar was before the door of a large shop

in Milsom Street, at the minute that Montresor, with Mrs. and Miss Meredith passed. He had nearly gone by before he was aware that Mrs. Templar herself was in the carriage. Then he returned to shake hands with her.

“Shall you,” she said, after a few words, “be at the ball to-night?”

“The ball! Oh! the weekly ball! I had not intended it. Are you going?”

“I am. I am sometimes glad, you know, to take a seat by Mrs. Morison; and, being ill to-day herself, she has asked me to *chaperone* her daughters.”

“What an alarming *chaperone*,” he said, smiling, “you will make! And the Miss Morison’s joint ages would certainly treble yours.”

“Oh, but as a married woman—”

“Of course; I was only jesting. And if I can come to aid you in your duties, I will. It is a little dissipated, however. To-morrow night’s will be such a very gay party.”

“Yes, I suppose so; still, do come!”

And Montresor said, in quitting the carriage window—

“I will, if possible.”

Now, if your dressmaker says she will send home your gown on a particular day “if possible,” she probably will not send it home on that day; if your bootmaker says he will send home your boots at a given time “if possible,” he certainly will not do so. But if a gentleman tells a lady he will be at a stated place “if possible,” she may—unless under extraordinary circumstances—expect to see him there.

Nettine, then, entertained no doubt of the attendance of Montresor, and, as she desired the absence of Mr. Paul Vaughan, whose ball-going usually depended on hers, she untruthfully informed the latter that she purposed remaining at home.

And having thus expected and thus plotted, and being unpractised, or nearly so, in that commonest effort of conventionalism which

withholds the countenance from indicating the emotions of the mind ; she, when the two or three early dances given by her to Sir Walter Wing and others, had come to an end, commenced to sit with her eyes fixed so almost immovably on the doorway at which no Montresor entered, as to create astonishment in even the better controlled faces of the Miss Morisons ; who, in intervals between the dances, or in pauses during a waltz, would irritate her with such attentions as—
“Do you mind our leaving you, dear Mrs. Templar ?” “I really think it is naughty of us both to do so !” “We want to see you dancing yourself.”

She did not dance herself, however ; and she did continue to sit with those large, singular, astonished, and, at last, angry eyes, turned in one direction. The small number of persons present, as compared with the ordinary attendance at those balls, rendered her looks and her conduct conspicuous ; but of this she took no heed. She noticed, in-

deed, the thinness of the room, but only to remind herself of the gay party to take place on the following night at Lady Featherstone's—a party at which Montresor would not fail to be present. Then she turned her eyes back again to the empty doorway, and felt as if it were the entrance to something horrible, and that all light and music had gone out. Alas! for the light of her love—the music of her anticipations—they had done so.

And that old, sinister doubt we have mentioned as hovering one dull November day around the door and windows of her mind, now, seeing it dark, entered it. *She had been trifled with.* She was nothing now to Montresor, and probably never had been much. Not his friendship only, but his heart, was Lady Featherstone's,—probably had long been so. She had been soothed and caressed but to save her from flinging herself into other arms. *She had been trifled with.*

And as this grew into a conviction her face darkened so remarkably that Miss Morison,

who was dancing in a quadrille at no great distance, said to her sister, Miss Jessica, as they exchanged places—

“Do you think Mrs. Templar is ill?”

And Miss Jessica replied—

“At any rate, she will probably recover now.”

Upon which the elder girl, turning her own eyes in the direction her sister's had taken, beheld Mr. Paul Vaughan in the act of crossing from the door to the bench on which Mrs. Templar was seated. Naturally, other eyes than theirs would turn upon the pair, and, almost unfortunately, there was no one very near to hear what was said. But we will indulge the reader.

“You must wonder to see me!” said the lady, in giving the gentleman her hand. “But Mrs. Morison asked me to *chaperone* her daughters.”

“And my good genius, if a fellow has such a thing,” the gentleman replied, “impelled me here. He or she told me it was on the

cards a woman might change her mind. I only wish he or she had thought fit to give me the information a little earlier; since you," he added, turning to her rather reproachfully, "did not. You might have saved him the trouble, considering how well you know that only to sit and look at you for three hours would bring me at any time from the uttermost ends of the earth."

"At least," she said, "I am glad you have come. Shall we dance the next waltz? And do you think in the meantime you could get me a glass of wine?"

"Do I *think*?" he exclaimed, and sprang up and offered her his arm. It had struck him, indeed, in the few words she had spoken, that her voice was a little husky, and that there was something unusual in her eyes; and the not very unreasonable thought that she had been annoyed at his absence, passed through his mind.

Where he got the wine I do not exactly know, for tea was the only refreshment pro-

vided on such occasions ; but get it he did, and brought it to her in a large claret-glass, the whole contents of which she drank a little eagerly. Then she said, "Now shall we waltz?"

And as the music had recommenced, her beautiful white face was seen in a few seconds floating near his shoulder in the circle of the dancers ; and persons who looked on made such comments as they pleased.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE ON THE LEFT—THREE ON THE RIGHT OF
THE THROAT.

It is necessary to return to Montresor who, when he passed Mrs. Templar's carriage, had been on his way to Sydney Place. Taking leave of Mrs. and Miss Meredith at the top of Pulteney Street, he went on to Lord Featherstone's, and as at the moment of his arrival there a footman was in the act of receiving a letter or note from a brother Jeames at the

open door, he was shown a little suddenly into the presence of the countess.

He found her seated in a deep *fauteuil*, and bending at the moment of his entrance rather forward over her arms, which she held in a peculiar manner that attracted his notice. On hearing his step she lifted her face to his with a smile, and with the softest, gladdest welcome in eyes that became, however, in the next moment a little troubled. From whatever cause, in meeting Montresor's regards her eyes became, as I have said, troubled; the smile died on her lips, and was replaced by an agitated, nay, terrified expression of countenance; and, finally, when Montresor came close to her she started from her chair, covered her face with one of her hands that had fallen, after the first instant, to her side, and saying—

“I am not well!—I will return to you!”—
passed quickly from the room.

Montresor's own face grew very pale as he approached a table and took from it a book—a

miniature—something at hand. I do not think he knew at all how long he had been standing there when a servant entered to say the countess was feeling too unwell to return to the drawing-room at that moment, but would be very glad to see Colonel Montresor for an hour in the evening, if he found himself disengaged.

“Tell her ladyship,” Montresor replied, “I will be here at nine o’clock.”

And at nine o’clock he was there—in the drawing-room again in Sydney Place; and had no sooner entered it than he perceived that Lady Featherstone had quite recovered—to all appearance, quite. This did not turn him from his purpose, however.

“Dear Lady Featherstone,” he said, in leading her to a chair when she had assured him that her indisposition had completely passed away, “you must not let what I am going to say agitate you. You will not when I tell you that I have reproached myself for keeping silence until now. This secret that

you once hinted at has preyed upon your health. It must not do so any longer. If," he said, and drew her, but very gently, closer to him, "if I have not already guessed it, you must tell it to me now."

"Have you," asked the countess, turning her eyes on him, "never heard—"

"Never a sentence!—never a syllable! But I think I have guessed the truth. May I tell you what I have guessed? I have guessed that you have a living child."

"It is so!" she said.

"And that the rest is uncertain. My own, only love, be calm. Be hopeful, and—for all our sakes—be calm. Presently I will ask you to tell me how much or how little more you know."

"Oh! God be praised!" she ejaculated, "it is much. Within the last few days, the last few hours, even, it is much. Montresor! *give* me calmness! *make* me calm!" And in her great excitement she cast herself upon his breast.

With exquisite tenderness and self-control he soothed her,—soothed and calmed and gradually restored her to composure. He drew her to speak, and with something of the arrangement of narration, of this part of her life's unparalleled history : of her unquestioning belief up to the last twelve months in the story written and subsequently told her of the child's death ; of the terror and anxiety, almost engulfing the joy, with which she then heard the contradicting fact of its existence ; of the increase of her joy in receiving through all her daily and hourly anxiety the Earl's solemn, immovable, unvarying assurance of the purity of life and principles, the loving, self-sacrificing nature of the woman to whose care he had committed (as it turned out) the "sole daughter of his house ;" of the fluctuating character of the information their best endeavours for a long time obtained ; of how during even this very winter her hope had almost gone out, and then again for a short while burned so steadily and brightly as to

illumine her way, and the whole earth, and even heaven; of how the pecuniary importance to himself of success in the search he was prosecuting, had been recently made known to the Earl; of the spur—if, indeed, any were needed—this had been to his efforts; of how the wonderful intelligence had reached them that the child had been traced into the family of Lord ——, now our ambassador at ——, that it—she—had been adopted when a child by Lady ——, had grown up under her eye, had been introduced by her into society, and had become the wife of a Russian nobleman high in office at St. Petersburg, and in the favour of the Czar. “And now,” said Lady Featherstone, lifting to Montresor’s a face radiant with natural, with reasonable excitement, “do you tell me to be calm?”

“Yes!” he replied, “always—under all circumstances—calm. It is well for us all to be so, and for you—who have suffered so much—especially. And tell me—this merciful, this glorious intelligence,—is it quite reliable?—quite convincing?”

“To us, quite. But my lord’s agents admit that for legal proof something more is still necessary. A person he has a high reliance on leaves for St. Petersburg—has, I suppose, left—to-night.”

“Dear Lady Featherstone,” Montresor said, after a little thoughtful pause, “I am well acquainted with Lady ——. She is, indeed, a distant relative, and always a valued friend of mine. Her younger sister, Lady Flora Heathcote, was the dear companion of my wife. She—I mean Lady —— herself—is now at St. Petersburg. Will you allow—will you authorise me to go there and see her?”

“You! Would you do this?”

“Even this!” he answered; and their hands met, and their silence was very eloquent.

“I go then!” he said, “on Saturday morning early. You will confide implicitly in my discretion not to commit you or Lord Featherstone in any respect, but to learn from Lady —— such particulars as I

think she will not refuse to me when I confide to her my warm interest in the matter; such particulars as may make 'assurance doubly sure,' and I will hope may bring legal proof within your reach. I shall not be long absent."

"Listen!" said Lady Featherstone, rising as he rose, one hand still in his, the other placed upon his arm. "You have but to ask one question of Lady ——, which she will answer if asked by you, but might not if it were put by another. Some months before the child was born I heard intelligence that pained me. I had a trick—I have it now—of clasping at such moments my throat with my left hand. I did it—my poor cousin said I did it—then, and when the child was born there were the bright red marks of the thumb on the left side, and the tips of three fingers on the right, of its throat. I do not believe those marks have ever entirely faded away. Wherever that child is, those four red marks will be discovered."

“One on the left, three on the right of the throat,” repeated Montresor; and he took out his pocket-book and made a note of it.

“The very high dresses that are now worn,” the Countess said, “in the morning, would, of course, conceal them; and in the evening a necklace would do the same. But Lady —— cannot but be aware of the peculiarity. If it does not exist—”

“Nay, it may have disappeared?”

“Never!” Lady Featherstone returned. “The marks were too definite,—they are too vividly before my eyes. When I see them again, and not till I see them, I see my child.”

You are aware that from Sydney Place to the Royal Crescent is no trifling distance. Nevertheless, the night was only twenty minutes past ten, when Montresor entered his own hall. He had come from the town by Gay Street, the park side of the Circus, and Brock Street; and preoccupied as he was, the few chairs and carriages that were stirring

had failed to remind him of the reunion taking place at the Assembly rooms.

“I shall have instructions for you in the morning,” he said to Rawlings, who always looked into the library the last thing before retiring to rest; and then he seated himself before his desk, and wrote and folded and sealed several letters. It was only when the clock on his chimney-piece struck the half-hour after midnight, and that, at the same time, the wheels of a carriage rolling past his door made themselves heard, that he remembered Nettine and the ball. He had forgotten them utterly.

“Good God!” he exclaimed, and started up, and locked his desk, and turned down his lamp, and—Rawlings being gone to bed—possessed himself of the first hat that came to hand, and once more quitted the house. He might still be in time, he thought, to apologise for his forgetfulness, and hand her to her carriage.

Unhappily, he had scarcely turned into

the Circus before he beheld coming towards him in the darkness, a chariot, that he believed to be Mrs. Templar's; and, in fact, its lamps flashed on the white face and lustrous eyes, too angry for tears, of Nettine, as she was carried past him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COUNTESS OF FEATHERSTONE "AT HOME."

THE morning instructions received by Rawlings were such as considerably astonished that excellent servant, notwithstanding that there was no interrogatory note in his voice, no suspicion, even, of surpris  in his eye, when he lifted the last from his shoes. The departure of Colonel Montresor at twenty-four hours' notice for the continent might have been the least extraordinary affair in the world.

You will conceive that on such an occasion there would be other things than letter-writing—though that occupied the greater part of the forenoon—to be done. There would be matters to set straight with Rawlings himself, who united in his own person the functions of butler and house-steward. There would be orders for his valet. There would be a visit to the bank. There would be—if he happened to have any law matters on hand—a conference with his solicitor to be held. All these things take time, and you will not be violently surprised to hear that it was not earlier than three o'clock that he found himself at liberty to leave home for the purpose, in the first place, of an apologetic visit to Nettine. As, however, he quitted his own door, he beheld Mr. Paul Vaughan in the act of entering at Mr. Templar's. This altered his intention, and he was not ill-satisfied to perceive Mrs. Templar's maid, Mademoiselle Pauline, likewise approaching the house from the direction of the town.

“Make my compliments,” he said to her in French, “to Madame, and be so very good as to tell her that I have been greatly engaged with business. I may not find it possible to call on her this afternoon, but hope to see her to-night at the ball.”

Then, with the inimitable bow that differed but little whether it were made to peeress or to peasant, he went on his way.

This way carried him to Sydney Place. He did not remain there long, and quitted it for the Club where he remained about the time it was his custom to remain, particularly desiring it to appear that his departure on the morrow should not be attributed to any extraordinary cause. At seven o'clock he had a dinner engagement in Cavendish Place, which he kept; and a little before ten the carriage he used for evening visiting, and rarely at any other time, conveyed him to my Lord Featherstone's door.

When he had made his bow to my lady, and spoken to a few of the persons who had

already arrived, he seated himself by Mrs. Meredith, on a sofa commanding the doorway, to observe the arrival of the rest. He wished not to miss the arrival of Mrs. Templar. He desired to accost her in the moment of her entrance into the room. That entrance, too, was always a pretty sight; her toilette, her youth, her whiteness, and that wide, inquiring look of her dark eyes, which Mrs. Arnold had in the first moment of seeing her, found so singular, and which on such occasions as the present they always reproduced, rendered her first appearance in a room full of society a charming thing to observe.

It did not seem, however, that unless Montresor continued to occupy one of the most agreeable places in the room for a longer time than an unselfish person would wish to do, the spectacle of Nettine's arrival would delight his eyes.

"Mrs. Templar is not here yet," Mrs. Meredith said, when the rooms were becom-

ing extremely full, and one quadrille had been danced, and a second was being so.

“No,” Montresor answered; “I have been expecting her entrance this half-hour.” And rising after this, he began to make his way through the crowd into the other room.

“You are not going to waltz, Lady Wing?” he said, to that lovely personage, who was moving forward a little eagerly to the edge of the circle that was forming.

And that lovely personage replied “No,” rather dolefully, but with a charming blush, notwithstanding, and took the offered arm of Montresor, who found a seat for her, the pleasantest that was available, and niched himself into a corner by her side, and did his possible for the next twenty minutes to amuse her. Then he gave up his corner to her sister, and passed on to some one else. But after a while, seeing nothing of Nettine in the dancing-room, he once more began to thread the concourse of persons between it and the outer, or reception saloon.

“Can you put me in the way of finding Mrs. Templar?” he asked of the elder Miss Hauton, who was, of course, present.

“Mrs. Templar!” she repeated, looking about her, “No, I cannot. I have not seen her. I fancy she is not here to-night.”

“Not here!” was Montresor’s mental ejaculation; and presently he might have been seen speaking to the lady of the house. Still the answer was—

“I have not seen her.”

Nor was she to be seen; and as the night advanced, and the hours during which she could be expected to arrive had gone by, the vexation of Colonel Montresor exceeded—so he told himself—the cause for it. Yet some cause there unquestionably was.

“The silly child!” he said to himself, “what a temper must be hers! To lose a ball—to affront Lady Featherstone—to throw away a proper opportunity of appearing in society—and all to punish me!” And when Lady Featherstone, who knew his looks so

well, came up to him, and said, "I am so sorry. You must not think it is in any way my fault. Besides the invitation, I have said to her repeatedly that I hoped she would come—and I really think she meant to do so. She may possibly be a little indisposed—" When Lady Featherstone said this, and looked besides so concerned for him, he felt more displeased with Nettine than he had ever felt yet. He had no belief in her indisposition. She had looked perfectly well the night before.

And just then, while he stood apparently regarding the gallop, but really deploring the manner in which Nettine had, in his opinion, thought fit to evince her resentment, some person near him said to some other person—

"Where in the world is Mr. Vaughan to-night?"

And Montresor looked round, and became, for the first time, aware that Mr. Paul Vaughan was absent also. This was worse and worse.

“Such a reckless disregard of appearances!” he was thinking as he took Mrs. Hauton down stairs to supper. “Such a selfish want of consideration for all feelings but her own,” he continued to think, while helping trifle to Lady Wing. On another evening he might have considered it still more gravely; but on this one his mind was occupied with many matters, and in the presence of the sympathy and the solicitude that appeared in the countenance of Lady Featherstone, of the pure, tranquil, loveliness she wore over the tragedy of her life, the temper—as he deemed it—of Nettine seemed scarcely more or less than an impertinence.

Softer thoughts of her came, when the ball was at an end, in the solitude of his own house, in the sleepless hours of the so-called night, and in the morning of the new day. Still, he felt he had perhaps been too patient of, too indulgent to, her waywardness, her improprieties; and that it might be well to

let her feel for once that he could evince displeasure at conduct intended to displease him. In passing Mrs. Templar's door, then, at the early hour that the exigencies of his journey rendered it necessary it should be commenced, he knocked, and gave to the footman a letter for his master, which he desired might be delivered to the latter as he came down-stairs.

"He and Mrs. Templar are well?" he asked, in turning from the door."

"Ye—es, sir."

"My kindest compliments to both. You will say I hope very soon to see them again."

Afterwards, when what I shall have to write came to his ears, Montresor recalled the scared face of the man, whom he left looking in a bewildered sort of way at the letter remaining in his hand on that bright, cold March morning, at Mr. Templar's door.

CHAPTER X.

IN PARK STREET.

As it is on a first of April that we ask the reader to turn and follow a handsome and fashionably-dressed man, who is crossing from Upper Brook Street into the adjacent one, the name of which indicates its vicinity to the Park, he (the reader) may perhaps prepare himself for a trick. No trick, however, is designed; nor, unless he be a very unsuspecting person, can I even promise him a great surprise.

The man was Mr. Paul Vaughan, who, having knocked at the door in Park Street, betrayed some impatience of the length of time that elapsed before his knock was attended to. When the door was opened, he turned quickly round to enter the house.

"Mrs. Templar, sir," said the servant, or whatever she might be, "has desired me to say she wishes to be alone this afternoon."

"Pshaw!" Mr. Paul Vaughan answered, and walked past her into the hall, with as little civility as hesitation. At the foot of the stairs, however, he paused, and drew a little aside for the girl to precede him.

This her manner declined to do.

"Perhaps, sir," she said, "you will walk up yourself. Mrs. Templar's orders were so distinct that I should not think of intruding on her."

"Oh, all right!" was his reply; and he performed a trifling pantomime with his hair, and walked upstairs with as much *non-chalance* as he could assume, and opened the

drawing-room door, and was confronted by Nettine, who, partly reclining on a sofa, had raised her head at his entrance, and now met his regards with thoroughly displeased eyes.

"I gave orders," she said, in a voice that perfectly suited them, "that you were not to be admitted."

"You did not give your orders," he replied, "to *me*. Therefore, I am here."

"What do you want? You have been here once to-day."

"I want to know if you will come to one of the theatres?"

"I told you I would not."

"You told me you would not go to the opera."

"I will not go anywhere—thank you!"

"You would do much better than in moping here."

"I do not mope!"

"I say you *do*. I thought you had better pluck."

Nettine now sat quite upright on the sofa.

“Mr. Vaughan,” she said, “when you agreed to accompany me to London, you also agreed to visit me in the same manner you had been accustomed to do in my own house, and no other.”

“Well, I have kept to the agreement.”

“You have not. My footman, if he had received my orders not to admit you, would have shut the door in your face. Because Miss B. or Eliza—for I do not know which you saw—could not do that, you force your way into my drawing-room.”

“I have a good mind to say I’d never set foot in your drawing-room again, either by force or anything else, as long as I live.”

“That *just* as you please.”

“You would like me, I dare say, to go back, looking like a fool, to Bath.”

“I don’t know why you should look like a fool particularly.”

“At any rate,” he said, after a little pause, “we need not quarrel. You used to like the theatres. Why not go to one of them to-night?”

"No,— no theatres!" she replied. "They make me sick."

"Everything makes you sick," he answered moodily. "You should drink champagne, instead of the abominable sherry they get you. Then you would not be low-spirited in this way."

He walked to the window and looked out. It is not too much to say he bitterly regretted the thing—the Quixotic thing, he called it—that he had done. Whether, indeed—but there is no need to drag any more secret motives or expectations of his to the light. He told himself he had done an absurd, Quixotic thing, and he repented it.

"Will you change your mind," he asked, "if I look in again later, when you have dined?"

"No. Do not come. I shall have gone to my room. At any rate, I shall not see you."

"I have a d—d good mind," he said, in taking his hat, "not to come here again at all!"

And he slammed the door after him, and left the house.

And when he was gone, Nettine rose slowly from her sofa, and began to walk up and down the room. She had suffered, on that sofa, so much misery of mind, that, except when weariness of body made it physically acceptable to her, she hated it. She walked, then, up and down the room, and now she rested her forehead or her cheek against the wall at one end, and now at the other; and sometimes she would sit down on one of the upright chairs that had their backs to the windows, and gaze wretchedly round the apartment, or cover her eyes with her hand.

“Montresor! — Montresor!” she would from time to time exclaim; and at last she would again throw herself on the sofa, and it would still be “Montresor! Montresor!” and not another word.

That Montresor had left her to her fate, she did not for an instant imagine. To *that*

extent her faith in him was unimpaired. If not as the agent of her husband, as the agent of his own kind heart, he would seek her, to remonstrate, to reclaim, to rescue her from the position in which she had placed herself. But the delay was horrible. The sickness—the brain sickness—of her hope deferred was something hardly to be borne.

All anger against him had ceased to exist. Indeed, it had never been the sort of anger he had supposed it to be. If he could not be said to have misjudged, he had, at least, mistaken her,—as the best and wisest of us *do* mistake others. Even in the mad hours in which her elopement had been planned and executed, it was less anger, less revenge, less the wish to pain him, that actuated her, than the desire to be something to him through the inflicting of this pain. It was the grasping of the thorn that tears open the hand of one who feels himself falling. It was the throwing up of the arms of one who drowns, and but precipitates his own destruction. Her

agony was caused by his indifference: and it was in an effort to become of some importance with him, in any manner and by any means, that she, desperately, and most mistakenly, sought relief.

Desperately, indeed. I do not know that she herself saw quite at once how desperately. For she had taken no high honours in conventionalism, as you have seen. That London lodging, possibly, as contrasted with her own house in Bath, the attendance of Eliza, and the inquisitive looks of Mrs. and Miss B., in juxtaposition to the service and demeanour of the well-trained establishment of Mr. Templar—these were perhaps beginning to dimly reveal to her the outlines of a great change that she had brought upon herself. But her trust was in Montresor. Let *him* come, and all would be well—well in her estimation. Let *him* take some interest in her future, let *him* give some of his leisure to her present, and she would have little regret for house or position, while she would look on her escape

from Mr. Templar as easily achieved. If Montresor would but come!

In her own mind she found it difficult to account for the delay. She had very little concealed the step she had taken. Nothing could have been easier, she thought, than to trace her from Paddington to her lodging in so respectable a neighbourhood as that of Grosvenor Square. Moreover, she had shown herself at all the best theatres, and had driven frequently in the park. Still, she had seen nothing of Montresor; nor had inquiries for her, of any sort or kind, been made at her door.

CHAPTER XI.

A VISITOR.

By the first of April we know that the days begin to grow long. Nevertheless, Mrs. Templar dined—if the morsel she ate of the chicken they put before her could be called dinner—by candle-light on the evening in question, and was sitting at the table on which the chicken had been replaced by two little dishes of cakes and preserved fruit, when the door of the apartment was again opened,—this time by Miss B. herself.

“A lady,” said the latter, “of the name of

Davis, Mrs. Templar, begs to know if you will see her."

"A lady!"

"I think a lady—a genteel looking person. She hopes you will see her, unless you are particularly engaged."

"Yes," Nettine replied. "She can come up." And, with eyes that appeared very brilliant across the white table-cloth and in the light of the candles, she waited the re-opening of the door, which in a minute or so took place, to admit Mrs. Davis—"the housekeeper."

Nothing could exceed the respectfulness of manner of this last when, having closed the door behind her, she advanced a little way into the room.

"I am glad to see you, Mrs. Davis," said Nettine. "Pray take a chair and a glass of wine. When did you come up?"

"Only this morning," the housekeeper replied. "I feel glad to see *you*, madam, looking so well."

"Pretty well, thank you! I am a little surprised that you obtained my address so soon."

"We heard in Bath," the woman returned, always respectfully, "that you were staying in Park Street."

"You heard?—Colonel Montresor—"

"No. It was Mr. Tomkins" (Tomkins was Mr. Templar's butler) "that heard it. He has a brother living in Upper Brook Street who knows Mr. Vaughan, and had seen him coming in and out."

"Quite likely!" Mrs. Templar replied. "Mr. Vaughan visits me here, as he did in the Crescent."

"Of course he would—being in town."

"And Mr. Templar—?" Nettine interrogated—

"He was quite well when he left."

"When he left!"

'The housekeeper' was embarrassed.

"Mr. Templar," she said, "is not in the Crescent now."

“And where, then, is he?” demanded Nettine, whose eyes had opened wider and wider. “You need, I suppose, have no reserve, if I desire none. In what way did my absence first become known?”

“We,” the housekeeper commenced, “of course knew in the morning that you had not returned from the ball at Lady Featherstone’s. Thomas had been up all night, and when the cook, and housemaids, and Richard, and then Mr. Tomkins and I, and last of all Mademoiselle Pauline, came down and heard what he had to say, we could do nothing but look at each other without knowing what to make of it. Mr. Templar was not yet stirring, and while we were consulting—Mr. Tomkins, and Pauline, and I—whether he had best be informed, there came a double knock to the door, and Tomkins himself ran up to open it. It was then about nine o’clock, and when he came down and said it was Colonel Montresor, who had left a note for Mr. Templar, and a message by which he (Tomkins) understood

that Colonel Montresor was going away, and hoped to see Mr. and Mrs. Templar when he came back, we were more surprised than ever. It decided us, though, to take no steps till Mr. Templar had read the note left by Colonel Montresor.

“About ten o'clock Mr. Templar came downstairs to breakfast, and Tomkins, when he returned to the housekeeper's room after giving him the note and the message, said he seemed very much put out by it, and was walking up and down the parlour, as you have seen him, madam, when discomposed.”

Nettine did not forbear a smile.

“However, we hoped—you will forgive me—we hoped there was nothing much the matter, till the bell was rung, and after answering it Tomkins came hurrying down as white as a sheet to say that his master had asked if Mrs. Templar meant to breakfast in her room? He had not dared to answer, and came to us to know what was to be said. There could be no concealment any longer,

and we would have had him go back with the truth. He swore, however, he would take no such information to his master, and in this case the most proper thing seemed to be for Mademoiselle Pauline to deliver it herself, which she had no sooner done than the parlour bell rang violently, and Richard, going up to answer it, was dispatched for Mr. H——, who you probably know is Mr. Templar's lawyer.

“Mr. H—— was not long before he came. Indeed, he came much sooner than we expected. He was not always at his office so early, but I believe the man met him somewhere on the way. He was shown into the breakfast-room, and was alone for, I think, about ten minutes with my master. Then the bell was again rung, and Mademoiselle Pauline and I were the first persons sent for. Would you wish me to go on?”

“Yes; go on.”

“Mademoiselle Pauline stated that your toilette on the previous evening had been a

ball toilette, made at the usual time and in the usual manner ; that your robe was white satin covered with skirts of tulle, caught up with bouquets of violets and long grass ; that you wore white shoes and gloves, with a necklace, a circlet, and bracelets of diamonds ; and over your dress a large velvet mantle with narrow border of sable and a hood lined with white silk and not carried over the head ; that she observed nothing unusual in your looks or manner ; that the carriage came to the door about a quarter before ten, she thought, and that you kept it but a few minutes waiting.

“ I had but to say that at exactly a quarter before ten by the clock in my sitting-room I heard the carriage come to the door ; that almost directly after Tomkins came to ask me to look at a large stain of grease on the carpet in the dining-room ; that in a few minutes I went up to do so ; that while in the dining-room I saw you pass through the hall wearing a white ball dress, nearly covered by such

a dark velvet mantle as mademoiselle had described, bordered with fur, and the capuchin at the back; that you had a diamond circlet on your head, and that I remembered the glitter of what might have been either a diamond necklace or brooch at the opening of the mantle; but that I could say nothing of bracelets, as your arms were not visible; that I heard the carriage drive away; that Tomkins, having closed the front door himself, returned to the dining-room; and that at the same moment the clock in the dining-room, and almost immediately after the one on the stairs, struck ten.

“The coachman had been sent for, but had not yet arrived; and Richard, who had gone further when he was despatched to fetch Mr. H——, but had since come in, was ordered up. Mrs. Templar, do you wish me to go on?”

“Go on,” said Nettine.

“He was very unwilling at first to say much; but Mr. H——, finding this, was pretty sharp with him, and in the end he was

obliged to speak. In entering the carriage you, he said, desired to be taken to No. —, Pulteney Street. He did not think anything of that, because you had on one or two occasions called for a lady and carried her with you to a ball. When, however, he had knocked at No. —, in Pulteney Street, and returned to the carriage, you, he stated, immediately quitted it, and, in quitting it, told him you would not require it any more that night.

“Here Mr. H—— questioned him very particularly, and he said that neither he nor the coachman thought anything of it, as they supposed you were going to Lady Featherstone's ball with friends, whose carriage would bring you home. Afterwards, however, he admitted that he did not accompany the carriage back, and that while standing about in the crowd that extended from Lord Featherstone's as far as the bottom of Pulteney Street, he saw you and Mr. Vaughan come out of the house you had gone into, and enter

what looked like a hired coach, and drive off. At this point, too, he was very unwilling to speak. In the first place, he rather implied that owing to the number of carriages in Sydney Place he could not see very distinctly whether you were set down at Lord Featherstone's or not. But Mr. H—— asked him one question, and asked him another, till he fairly acknowledged that the coach in which you were went on past the house, and, at the end of Sydney Place, turned round to the left in the direction of Cleveland Bridge.

“Both Mr. H—— and Mr. Templar were very severe with him when he had acknowledged this, and Mr. H—— inquired why he had not returned to the Crescent with the intelligence, and asked him what he had supposed from what he saw?”

“‘Oh!’ he said, ‘he made no doubt but what you would go to the ball. He thought, perhaps, you were taking a little drive first.’”

“‘Pay the fellow his wages,’ Mr. Templar said, ‘and turn him out of my doors!’”

“Heigh ho!” sighed Nettine. “Well?”

“Well, Thomas was just called to say that he had sat up all night, and that you had never come in. Then we were all permitted to go downstairs; and presently, after a little further conference with Mr. Templar, Mr. H—— went away. He came again, however, once or twice in the afternoon, and then we understood he had ascertained that you and Mr. Vaughan had taken the train either at the Box Station or at Chippenham—we heard both named—for London. We understood, too—indeed, Mr. Templar told me so himself—that his sister, Mrs. Beauvoir, was written to and expected.”

“Mrs. Beauvoir!”

“You have not seen her?”

“No. But all this time you have not mentioned Colonel Montresor!”

The eyes of the “housekeeper” fell a little from those that questioned her.

“I,” she said, “should have mentioned that Colonel Montresor left Bath the same

morning. I think I did mention it, and that he left a note for Mr. Templar and a message for yourself."

"Yes," Nettine replied. "But he appears not to have been aware of my absence. When did he come back?"

"He—I thought you might have known. But it was, I believe, a sudden thing—his journey to St. Petersburg."

"St. Petersburg!"

"In Russia. It sounds a great way off, but people take journeys now while in former days they would only have been thinking about taking them. He is not expected to be away beyond a few weeks. I was telling you of Mrs. Beauvoir. The next day but one she and her daughters arrived. They seemed very reserved and distrustful—most unnecessarily so—of everyone about Mr. Templar; and soon after this it was made known to us that Mr. Templar would return with them to Leamington, and that the establishment in the Crescent would be given up. A good many

things were packed and sent off, and the servants were made very short work of. Mr. Templar, however, expressed a wish that I would remain after his departure till the house could be handed over to the proper person to let it. There was a good deal, in many ways, to be done; and it was only yesterday that I was able to look on myself as free."

Nettine heard all this, for she subsequently evinced a knowledge of what had been told her, but at the time it sounded like the rushing of waters in her ears. The words "Russia" and "St. Petersburg," in large black and red letters like those on posters, filled the room. They were everywhere; on the walls, the doors, the carpet, the curtains, the white table-cloth under her eyes, and right across the forehead of the woman who had uttered them—the woman who beheld the beautiful face opposite her becoming ghastly in the extreme. Yet Mrs. Templar spoke not a word, and it was "the woman" who again broke the silence.

"Pauline," she said, "is gone into the service of Lady Wing. Have you, madam, suited yourself with a maid?"

"No!" Nettine replied, but in a voice unlike her own.

"I fancied," the *ci-devant* housekeeper returned, "you might not have done so, and came here partly with the hope I might be able, for a time at least, to make myself useful to you. The attendance in lodgings is not what you have been accustomed to."

"Do you mean," asked Nettine, still in a voice that did not at all resemble her own, "that you wish to be my maid?"

"I shall be very happy if you permit me to stay with you, Mrs. Templar, till you can suit yourself better."

"I think I shall return to Bath."

"To Bath!" repeated Mrs. Davis, with the slightest possible elevation of her dark eyebrows. "But that would be no objection. I should be very happy to attend you to Bath. Are you feeling quite well?"

"I don't know," Nettine replied. "I never was ill, that I remember : but I think, perhaps, I am going to be."

Mrs. Davis rose quietly and went towards her.

"I should be glad, madam," she said, "to see you lie down a little on the sofa. You have, perhaps, over-exerted yourself, and the situation of this street is not a cheerful one. I hope you will let me take a little of the nurse upon me as well as the maid, and prescribe you carriage exercise and air, and better wine than this is, and to be very quiet and careful of yourself till Colonel Montresor comes back. May I ask, are you ever hysterical at all?"

"No—never now! If you stay with me you had better go and make some arrangements for yourself. I do not think I shall remain here long, however—unless I do get very ill, that is."

With an unwonted yielding to the suggestions of another, Nettine *did* leave the table

as Mrs. Davis left the room, and *did* seat herself on that terrible sofa, where she had not been long before her eyes took their old Upper Camden Place direction, but with an expression as different from their old expression as can well be imagined. It was the intensity of her suffering that was rendering her still; the active misery of her mind that was borrowing, so to speak, all the powers of her body. She looked into that mind—though her eyes were on the ceiling—and beheld in it only the unmeaning and unsightly litter we discover in an apartment just vacated by one who has for some time occupied it. Uneducated and untravelled as she was, she had in the departure of Montresor for a place so vaguely remote, received a shock from which even the woman Davis began after a while to think it might need his return to recover her. For as days went on there was no improvement, but the reverse. She had no appetite. The air chilled, exercise fatigued her. Books had never much interested her, and now she

sickened at the sight of them. She seemed to have lost the power to hope, even in so reasonable a direction as that of Montresor's return: and the stimulant in the shape of wine that she resorted to, and which, indeed, a medical man would perhaps, at any rate in the commencement, have prescribed, was producing an irritability and restlessness that the "housekeeper" beheld with alarm.

Before this began, and within twenty-four hours after she heard of the departure of Montresor, she had, of her own counsel, terminated the acquaintance between Mr. Paul Vaughan and herself. She received him, thanked him, with a gentleness that was new in her, for the help he had afforded her in her elopement, and told him it was her earnest wish that he should visit her no more. Truth to say, he had suffered much mortification at her hands; and I think, though he duly delivered himself of the proper remonstrances, the extraordinary alteration in her looks, which he attributed to remorse for the step she had taken, made him

not altogether displeased to be honourably quit of the affair. It was Nettine's last mental exertion before sinking into a state that her attendant, Mrs. Davis, beheld, as I have already said, with alarm.

CHAPTER XII.

“BE WITH ME!”

“HAD you any idea,” asked my Lord Featherstone while drinking his one nightly cup of the tea served in the drawing-room within half-an-hour after dinner, and during the only ten minutes in which the Earl and Countess ordinarily exchanged half a dozen sentences, otherwise than in the presence of the servants in the fourteen hundred and forty—“had you any idea that woman, Mrs. Templar, had come back to Bath?”

“No,” her ladyship replied. “Has she done so?”

“They say she is lodging in the street at the back here. About the most impudent, heartless thing, I should suppose, that ever was done !”

“Mr. Templar, however,” said Lady Featherstone, after a little pause, “has left Bath.”

“Fortunately for himself. But every soul she knows, and the people she belongs to, live here. However,” he added, testily, “it is *not* impudent, if you prefer having it so, She has drunk herself mad they say;—it is her best excuse.”

“Drunk !”

“So N—— says. If you are better informed, be it so.”

“Mr. Paul Vaughan,” said my lady very gravely, and looking very white, “has a great sin to answer for !”

“Oh ! we all have great sins to answer for !” returned my lord with an indifference, not to say levity, that must have been felt by his

countess to be particularly unseasonable. "She would have run away with somebody before the end of the year."

"But she has," said my lady interrogatively, "care and attendance, and comforts—that kind of thing?"

"Upon my word," the earl returned, "I did not inquire. To a certain extent, I conclude. Old Templar, they say, will give her nothing, and in all probability she had not a considerable private fortune of her own."

With the last words Lord Featherstone set down his tea-cup, and after taking a single turn in the apartment, approached the door. Her ladyship, in rising from the table, perceived this and followed him a few steps.

"And—St. Petersburg?" she said, "You have heard nothing?"

"Yes," my lord replied; "I had a letter from G—— this morning. I did not mention it because, though satisfactory, it is still not conclusive."

"But it is satisfactory?"

“Very much so,” and, almost in speaking, his lordship closed the door which he had already opened behind him.

For some moments Lady Featherstone did not stir. When she did, and returned to the table, she brought a face very ghastly with her sorrow and anxiety to the light; and, while her eyes looked straight before her, one hand sought—almost unbidden, it seemed—the bosom of her dress, from which it presently detached a letter. It was the unfolding of this by her own fingers that, in the end, attracted her regards. It (the letter) was dated ten or eleven days back:—

“—— —, St. Petersburg,

“April —th.

“MY DEAR LADY FEATHERSTONE,

“I HAVE seldom more regretted anything than at this moment my promise to write. My letter must be unsatisfactory, contradictory, and inconclusive. I cannot permit myself to strengthen your hope; yet

have little or no doubt myself. It is, let me say at once, in answer to your expectation only that I take up my pen.

“Lady —— is unfortunately ill, and in a way that renders it probable she may not be able to receive me for several days. In the meantime I have had the honour of seeing and speaking to the Countess F——.

“It was last night, at the —— Palace. Let me not say more, while this uncertainty lasts, than that she is charming, accomplished, and if looks may be believed, good. And, dear Lady Featherstone, do not be too much elated, confirmed, by what I am next to say. I have to guard you against the impression that I own I myself received ; but the likeness of the Countess F—— to my Lord Featherstone is undoubtedly very great. While counselling you not to be made too sanguine by what may be only a singular coincidence, I see not that I have a right to suppress the fact.

“On the other hand, I was, I grieve to

say, unable to discover anything of those peculiar appearances you make so important. She wore a necklace that might easily have concealed them, and my impatience of this was hardly controllable, yet forced to be controlled while I watched for an opportunity that at length presented itself. A satin mantle she wore slipped a little from her shoulders; and in assisting her, as I eagerly did, to adjust this, I displaced the necklace on the right of her throat—the side I most desired to observe. A slight redness there certainly was, but not greater, I think, than the movement of the necklace would occasion; and as for three separate marks I can undertake to say they do not exist. Whether they ever did it must be for Lady —— to pronounce. The trifling redness I perceived may be the last faint trace of them.

“And now, let me not say another word. Dear Lady Featherstone, your own convictions will be your safest guide. If you feel that these marks must have been indelible,

then moderate your hopes in this direction. You command my services, I need not repeat, in this and every other. If this disappoint, we must recommence, with all our united energies anew, and success—unless God will otherwise—cannot be very distant.

“In the hour in which I see Lady — I will write to you again, and not sooner. Ever, dear Lady Featherstone,

“Yours, faithfully,

“HARRY MONTRESOR.”

“And,” murmured the countess, in replacing the letter, with a white and quivering lip, “while he has been employed for me I have not employed myself for him. While he has been seeking to restore to me my child in the body, the soul of this other child has perhaps been lost. Oh, my God! be with me in this hour—aid me in this work. God and Father of Magdalen, suffer that I be not even now too late!” And, sinking

gently on her knees, her ladyship buried her face in her hands in prayer.

In the meanwhile the Earl was traversing the library underneath. In this apartment the three burners of a lamp, suspended from the ceiling, were lighted; an ample fire, moreover, appeared to have been recently stirred into a bright blaze; and, either from this excess of light, or from the deep crimson of the curtains and furniture, or from some other cause, his lordship's pallor was remarkable. Nay, a certain haggardness we have not formerly observed had possession of his features.

He held a letter crushed up within his hand; and suddenly he paused beneath the lamp, spread out this letter—one on post paper, and folded as letters were still sometimes folded four and twenty years or so ago—on the table, placed a paper-weight on it, and recommenced his walk up and down the room. That letter was not a satisfactory one.

In saying that it was so, Lord Featherstone had simply lied.

Nothing could have been less satisfactory than that letter to a man in the Earl's position. This last was becoming, *had* become, imminent; and the expensive journey made by his agent served at the same time to convince his own mind of the identity of the Countess F—— with the daughter born to himself and Lady Featherstone, and to reveal to him the importance of the seemingly lost link required to complete the legal proof of such identity. Not his present only, but his whole future, was at stake; and sufficiently vehement passions were, moreover, excited. He had not made the figure he had lately done without having become conscious of certain rivalries, certain hostilities, that to a man of his temper had been as fuel to the fire of political ambition and desire of personal power lighted within him. Never, at any period of his varied and hitherto little reputable career, had money, had an income,

been to him the vital thing it had now become. For want of it—and a very moderate sum would have sufficed—such a sum as he could without difficulty remember to have lost more than once at the gaming table in a single night—for want of it, an age a thousand times more brilliant than his youth, a future as much a contrast to his past as wealth to poverty, as honour to dishonour, as light to darkness, would be wholly and irrecoverably and contemptibly lost. No wonder that he crushed the letter again and again within his hand. Worse information to one in his state of mind it hardly could have given. While barring—or nearly so—success in this direction, it forbade him to seek it in any other.

He paused in his walk, while the clock on the staircase struck nine. I know not why he paused, but he did so; and then, when after the last stroke he was commencing to move forward, the bell of the front hall door made itself heard.

It was quietly, might even have been thought to be cautiously, rung; and there seemed as little reason as could well be for my lord's supposing that it concerned himself. Yet most unwontedly he opened the door of the library, and, while a footman responded to the summons, made a step forward into the hall.

CHAPTER XIII.

BELLA.

“Is the Earl of Featherstone at home?” was the question asked in a woman’s voice ; and when the footman hesitated, and stood a little back, and looked towards that nobleman himself, the hall lamp lighted a face known both to the Earl and to us. Direct went the flashing black eyes it contained to those of my Lord Featherstone.

“I wish, my lord,” the woman said, “most particularly to speak to you !” and my lord,

re-entering the library, not as in refusal, but as coldly acceding to her request, she passed the astonished and rather terrified Jeames, followed his lordship into the apartment in which she had once been before, and closed the door of it on him and on herself.

When she had done so she turned to find the Earl regarding her sternly. I know not whether her self-possession a little failed her, but he was the first to speak.

“You have come here again!” he said.

“My lord,” she answered, “I have come here again. May I ask if you have been so successful in other quarters that any information I may be able to give you is not needed?”

“I do not understand you!” my lord replied, and in a voice that the woman said afterwards had sounded like cold steel. Yet apparently it roused no anger in her.

“I regret your tone, my lord,” she replied, almost sadly. “Since I stood here last” (by the way she had sat when she was there last,

but she stood now) "since I stood here last I am to some extent changed. If your lordship will believe me, I come here in kindness, not in hatred."

"Bah!" said the Earl.

"Revenge, my lord, is, according to my experience, the most imperious of human passions, and the one the most easily satisfied. Such is my experience of it, and mine has been more than satisfied."

"Woman!" demanded Lord Featherstone with an inconceivable *hauteur*, "of whom do you speak? Revenge of *yours*—on whom?"

She looked at him—looked *at* (I think no one just at that moment could have looked *into*) his cold, pitiless eyes; and, looking at them, held fast her words within her lips. But she made a step closer to him, and put out one hand—a slender, beautiful one—near to his arm but without touching it, and with the other (they were standing but a little distance from the window) drew back the curtain, rent away the blind, and pointed through

the glass to an upper window, lighted from within, of one of a row of small houses that looked very near them in the obscurity of the night.

“In that room,” she said, “there is a sick person. Guess, my lord, who the person is!—Hold! at your peril speak the word; for she is not one, and she *is*—your daughter.”

I do not think the Earl meant to strike, or actually struck, the woman; nevertheless, the movement he made was so violent a one that her arm met the writing tray on a table close by, and swept it off to the floor, shivering it into twenty pieces, and scattering its contents over the room.

“Devilish liar!” he exclaimed. But even as the words left his lips she beheld a light entering his eyes. The movement had been a genuine one—a movement of horror and fury. *It* had been genuine, but the words that followed it had been less so. As for the woman, her forbearance was almost dignity.

“My lord,” she said, “I forgive your-

violence. I could," she added with a sort of sadness that had in it the faintest accent of contempt, "have forgiven it had it been even greater. I am not come here without proof of what I know. I knew, or almost knew, as much when I came here last ; and had you, my lord, received me differently, or had I then possessed the greatness of mind to forgive the insult of your reception, the misery of the interval would never have had place. Your lordship has yourself to thank for it."

"Liar !" reiterated the Earl, and, after a moment's pause, strode forward to the bell. Her hand, though he shook it off, arrested him.

"Ring that bell," she said, "and my lips are closed. Summon your servant, send for your solicitor, and I am dumb. What I have to say I say in the first instance to yourself alone, and to no other."

Lord Featherstone glared upon her, but he controlled himself. Her intensity constrained him ; and, turning from the bell, he took a

chair by the back-rail and planted it close to the woman on the floor with no great impetuosity of manner, but with such a sort of concentrated force as must have made the servants below think it was coming through the ceiling. Then he threw himself upon another, pretty near, and turning his shoulder on the person to whom he was about to listen, he placed the contrary elbow on the back of his own chair, and covered the top portion of his uplifted and averted face with his hand.

“When,” commenced the woman—in whom the reader has long since discovered the “Bella” of that little family history related in the opening chapter of the second book by Mrs. Arnold to her daughter—“When I had looked upon you for the last time as the protector of the child about to be born to you, I quitted, as you are aware, my home—it would have been my choice to do so had a choice been left me—and withdrew myself, it was supposed, to a distance, but in truth not very far off. There, provided for by the generosity

of the only person who did not in that moment utterly abandon me, the child was born; and there, too, shortly afterwards by a strange chance, I met the man whose love I had repulsed for yours. He offered it again to my acceptance, and I accompanied him abroad. For two years I resided with him, and at the expiration of that time he died.

“He had a sister whose husband was then ambassador at the Court of —— . This woman, young and beautiful as a dream, sent me, with a singular nobleness, her purse—sent me, with a nobleness more singular still, her sympathy. Subsequently she visited me, and when the child came into the room—”

Here the Earl suddenly, for the first time, for the only time, and but during the quarter of a minute it took to ask and answer the question, turned his eye towards her.

“The child,” he said, “was with you? What child?”

“It *was* with me—the only child I ever had. When the child came into the room, the wife

of the ambassador took it into her arms, clasped it to her heart, and let fall upon its face a few such tears as might have been, and I believe were, its baptism into purity. I held my peace, and when she came again she said, 'If you will, in expiation of the past, perform an act of devotion, of sacrifice, my brother's child shall henceforth be mine.' Again I held my peace. Was I wrong? I think not; and I performed my act of sacrifice. That child is now the wife of a Russian nobleman high in office at the Court of St. Petersburg. So much for *my* child!—now for the child of the woman you made your wife.

“At the instance of Lady —— I was engaged by a Frenchwoman of rank, and literary tastes, acquainted to some extent with my history, in the capacity of amanuensis and reader, and with her I remained till I had merited from her such a recommendation as has since carried me pretty much wherever I wished to go.

“It is a little more than a year since, having

been for some time resident in London, I desired to improve my health on the continent, and accepted the situation of lady's maid to (I was told) the very young bride of an old monsieur who was anxious, in taking her to Paris, to secure for her the services of a person travelled and experienced like myself. Need I say the bride was Mrs. Templar? From the first moment, her conduct to me was wanting in almost all I had been accustomed to receive, and on the morning after I entered her service, she insulted and dismissed me.

“Such a dismissal was not so much a pecuniary loss, and disappointment of my plans, as it was—if not promptly contradicted—an injury to the position I had so long maintained. I hesitated not, therefore, to travel immediately to Bath, where I found that Mrs. Templar's family resided, in the hope of discovering such madness or execrable temper attributed to her as might bear me blameless.

“In this I was very little successful. The

friends of Mrs. Templar were not in the rank of life I had presumed them to be: moreover, a suspicion roused by the combination of my brother's christian name of Arnold with a professor's of music, though displaced for a time by what I heard in my interview with his wife and step-daughter, returned to disturb my arrangements and my mind.

“ During a few months' residence at Clifton I found my suspicions increase, and my anxiety to learn the truth became uncontrollable. I returned here, I took means to see the so-called Mr. Arnold, and at once recognised my brother.

“ No uncertainty remaining on this point, what was I compelled to believe? Alas! it is the wrong of which I most of all repent myself. I believed that the niece of my only brother must be the daughter of the only sister I ever had.

“ I am now about to give occasion to your sneer of disbelief. As I shall not see it, it is of the less consequence. I had something to

atone ; no one knows it better than yourself. I therefore sought and obtained a vacant situation in the household of Mr. Templar with the hope of protecting from harm, if it might be so, Fanny's child.

“ I found her—Mrs. Templar—passionately in love with Colonel Montresor who, devoted to Lady Featherstone, had no love to give elsewhere. Presently I beheld her, in the vain hope to pique Montresor, or, at any rate, to attract his observation to herself, receiving the attentions of your nephew, Mr. Paul Vaughan. Nevertheless, I did not as yet disquiet myself. From the last I apprehended no danger ; from the first I could apprehend none.

“ I had calculated feebly, as the event proved ; and while I expected with uneasiness a successor to Mr. Paul Vaughan, Mrs. Templar eloped with Mr. Paul Vaughan himself. But before this a rumour that Lady Featherstone had borne you a daughter had reached my ear, and in the hour I heard it I ceased to

believe Mrs. Templar my sister Fanny's child.

“ My internal convictions were strong ; but I had no proofs wherewith to convince others ; and the reception you accorded my visit determined me not to place the clue to a discovery that would advantage you in your hands. Then, as I have said, Mrs. Templar eloped.

“ In the first moment I found it possible to do so I followed her to London. I had no difficulty in tracing her to her lodgings there. Mr. Paul Vaughan was not residing with her in them—only visiting her as he had been used to do in her husband's house ; and I do not refuse you the mitigation of knowing that, beyond the guilt of utterly flinging away her good name, I believe her to be guiltless.”

“ Proceed ! ” said the Earl.

The woman, Bella, went on to describe how after hearing of Colonel Montresor's departure for St. Petersburg Mrs. Templar's spirits gave way, how she took leave of Mr.

Paul Vaughan, how she permitted her (Mrs. Davis) to communicate with Mr. Templar, and how, after the old man's harsh reply, which put an end to all idea of any return to her former position, she expressed a desire, uncontrolled like all her desires, to go back to Bath. "She was not aware," the narrator went on, "that I entered, in my letter to Mr. Templar, on the subject of money, and that he refused—as he expressed it—a single stiver. No thought in regard to money added, I am glad to believe, to her misery of mind. Her impending illness already clouded, I conceive, her brain. She could scarcely, after the first, be said to think, only to suffer. Unhappily, the large quantity of wine to which she had begun to accustom herself, and which I was unable to refuse her to the extent I should have wished, while it still farther obliterated thought, increased her suffering. And the necessity, even apart from resources of my own, was not immediate. Her ornaments, her

most ordinary belongings, were so costly that—but it is not important to speak of this.

“In the meantime, while we still remained in London, I did—I think—I hope—what little could be done to save her from utter despondency. For her mind—I spoke to her of patience, her youth, and the return in a few weeks of Colonel Montresor to England; for her body—I induced her to take all the fresh air, all the change of scene, that carriage exercise and her prostrate strength would permit. It was in our return from one of these airings that a momentary but distinct look of recognition in the eyes of Mrs. Templar attracted my notice. There was even an impulse, not carried out, but perceptible, to a forward movement in the vehicle, and quietly I noted the precise features of the locality in which this had occurred. I was the more accurate because I had been long on the out-look for something of this description.

“On the morrow, at an hour when I could

best be spared, I went out alone, took a fiacre—cab, was driven to the spot, and alighted there to prosecute my search. It was unsuccessful. At a little shop in which I made inquiries I was told of some sick women—for it was an invalid that, with a just instinct, I sought—and in some instances I was admitted to these, but none of them were persons I ever saw before. I returned discouraged ; but after a piece of intelligence that I adroitly drew from Mrs. Templar, I resolved to persevere.

“ Her toilette on that morning was a black silk, and this gave me the opportunity I desired to remark that mourning would become her well.

“ ‘ I never wore mourning,’ was her answer, ‘ in my life !’ and this was an important thing to know.

“ I returned again, then, to the same spot. It was now about a young girl that I inquired. Was one very pale and with large dark eyes remembered in that locality ? No. Invalids

had yesterday been found more readily than young girls to-day.

“I was now disheartened and on the point of returning to my fiacre, when a fight between some children, up a poorer looking court than any of those in which I had thought it needful to prosecute my search, engaged my eye. I entered it, and in doing so beheld a man come out from one of the houses, and draw the door to, not latching it, with a peculiar quietness behind him. I approached this door when the man had quitted the court, and, pushing it a little way open, began to hear a female voice *talking*, I at first thought, but presently found it was *praying* vehemently. I ascended a narrow stair, and entered a small, barely furnished chamber in which, on a bed which, though clean, was at least simplicity itself, were decently disposed—I did not for a moment doubt—the ghastly remains of my dead sister Fanny. The voice I had heard was that of a woman, a member I supposed

of some peculiar religious sect, who at the sound of my footstep or the rustle of my dress had, without rising from her knees, removed the apron from her face to look at me. Apparently she found nothing remarkable in my intrusion, for replacing it—I mean her apron—she fell to praying again more loudly than before. I drew near the bed and touched—may she forgive me—with my lips the poor, cold brow. With that idiot ranting in the corner I dared not trust myself to think,—I only saw. At my first movement, however, to leave, the praying creature started from her knees, and approaching excitedly the corpse, drew away the sheet from its bosom. On the clean linen night-gown that concealed—I dread to think—I asked not—what,—lay a portrait. My lord! it is here.”

I do not know whether my lord's eye turned for a moment towards it. His head did not, and I think he sufficiently believed the tale the woman Bella was telling him, to

be pretty certain, without looking, of the sort of evidence she had in her hand.

“In recrossing,” she continued, “the threshold I invited by a gesture the nurse, woman of the house, or whatever she might be, to follow me. She did so to the landing outside ; and there I gathered from her something of the last hours of the deceased. When I would have spoken of previous ones, however, she became more reserved ; and on my asking after the daughter who had quitted her nearly a year and a half before that time to become a singer, she did not control her anger.

“ ‘ Who are you,’ she said, ‘ who know so much and so little, and come here to slander the dead ? She was a single woman ! She never married, and had no daughter ! The young girl you speak of was the daughter of the man whose picture you saw on her bosom, and committed when an infant to her care.’

“ ‘ Are you sure of that ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ I am sure of it,’ she answered. ‘ I can

prove it to those it concerns: it does not concern you!' And retreating into the death chamber, and closing the door, she left me to quit the house as I had entered it.

"I had no longer any motive for detaining Mrs. Templar in London; and in a few days after this we quitted it and arrived in Bath, where she became so dangerously ill as to demand all my energies and occupy every moment of my time. Rheumatic fever—brain fever—she has gone through; and though these are better, though she may be considered out of danger from them, her heart remains so feeble as to render her state most precarious. The doctor himself says her life hangs on a thread. A sudden start—a trifling excitement,—and all may be over in a minute."

"And you," exclaimed the Earl, springing violently to his feet, and turning on her eyes full of rage, even fury, "you sit prating—gabbling—here! Liar, and mother of lies!" and as she rose from her chair he came within a pace of her, but no closer—"if for once

in your foul life you have spoken the truth, take me where I may convince myself of it. Mark me ! in *this* you cannot deceive me. *I shall know her !*"

For a moment a puzzled look was in the woman's eye—only for a moment ; I think in the next she reached an understanding of his words.

"It is," she said, adjusting her veil, "what I desire."

Simultaneously, through the space from which the curtain had been withdrawn, the regards of both directed themselves to the window of that opposite room in which a light was burning, and both saw at the same moment the shadow of some person within pass across the blind.

"It is you, my lord," said Bella, "who now make the delay."

At any rate, he delayed no further than to possess himself of his hat ; and in almost less than a minute they had quitted the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GREEN SILK CUSHION.

THE distance between Sydney Place and — Street was, as one phrases it, a mere step. I think there must have been a back way through the gardens that would have rendered it more inconsiderable still. This, however, Lord Featherstone did not take; and on the woman Bella's part there was probably the recollection of the door she had for a readier ingress left unclosed, to impel her to conduct his lordship in the more public and ordinary manner.

I do not suppose the night had advanced anything like five minutes before the Earl found himself in the entry of the small house in which Nettine had suffered her short but severe and dangerous illness. A candle left at the foot of the stairs had just, it was easy to discover, gone out; but the feeble ray of the moon streamed in through an opposite window at the top of the first flight, and enabled both the woman and my lord to ascend to the second floor.

On this the door of a room in which a light was burning was a little open, and Bella entered it. In the very act of doing so a slight sound, a movement, that seemed to her to come from the obscurity of the little landing to her left, caused her to pause. But for a second, however. She attributed it to the Earl who was close behind her, and who in the next moment she admitted into the apartment I have named.

It was a fairly sized one, simply furnished, but perfect in cleanliness and order. Lord

Featherstone premised it was not the apartment of an invalid. Nor was it. It was the apartment of the woman who, with a look of caution to her companion, moved on to the doorway of the sick room itself, which she had no sooner entered than a shriek of such extreme agony as rang from roof to basement left her lips, and caused the Earl to make it hardly more than a step to her side. He went no farther.

In the bed, a little raised by the pillows, with a face so white as to be scarcely distinguishable from the pillows themselves; with eyes preternaturally opened, but fixed in death; and with one hand tightly closed on the neck of the night-robe whose disarrangement gave to view four bright crimson spots—one on the left and three on the opposite side of the throat,—lay Nettine! unmistakably the ill-fated daughter of the Earl and Countess of Featherstone—the child committed to the sister of Bella Davis—the infant of

Philip Vaughan and the "Julia" of my first book.

"THIS," said the Earl, after a terrible pause, and turning on the horrified woman who had conducted him to such a spectacle a look that one must be an idiot to attempt to describe—"THIS, while you prated to me of your own history. Woman, you are my demon! Is this death?"

"She has," faltered the unhappy person, "attempted to rise, and the effort has—my God!—been fatal to her!"

"I ask you—is this death?"

"Alas! I fear so."

"Fear so! I say is this death? Go for a medical man—the first—the nearest!"

"It *is* death, but I will go. My lord, one word!—do you wish to be seen here?"

"I do not!"

"Then descend to the room below this. No one will interrupt you there. I have alarmed Mrs. — ; I hear her on the stairs ;

the servant, I suppose, is out. Pass through my bedroom : I will admit Mrs. —— by this door; and when I have admitted her your lordship will descend the staircase. Then I will leave her here and go for a doctor myself.”

Mechanically, it seemed, the Earl obeyed these directions; but it was not mechanically. He comprehended, even in that moment of bitterest disappointment, that they might be prudent ones. He passed through the bedroom, and at the proper moment he descended the stairs to the little back drawing-room, and there you perhaps think he gave himself up at last to remorse. Do not say that what I am about to write is improbable till you have found yourself in such a position as to your money matters and your ambitious projects as the Earl of Featherstone. He did not give himself up to remorse, but to a keen and, for a man not a lawyer, a wonderfully astute calculation of certain legal claims authorized by the proof he now possessed of the existence of a daughter up to

this very hour. The result of his calculations satisfied him ; and, when after some fifteen minutes and the visit of a medical man to the chamber above, the woman Bella came to him to say that it *was* death, he received the information almost as one whom it no longer interested. It was well for her that she had not looked to such a moment as this for her revenge. I think she saw, at least to some extent, how it was ; but her sadness exceeded her contempt.

“It will be necessary,” she said, “for me to send to Mr. N——, as he is the medical man who has attended her.”

“You will do,” his lordship replied coldly, in descending the stairs, “what may be proper ; and when I have been professionally advised, you shall hear from me. It may not be much before noon to-morrow. Good evening to you !”

And Bella Davis, on her part, replied, “Good evening, my lord.”

The clock in Lord Featherstone's brightly-

lighted hall was only striking ten, when the door opened to admit him ; and it was perhaps this bright light and this sound that prevented his eye or ear from perceiving that the footman had something to say. Passing hastily in, his lordship, however, suddenly paused on beholding the figure of a man emerge from his own dining-room. His astonishment at beholding a man at all in such a place at such an hour, was succeeded by a more displeased sort of surprise, when he recognized a member of the medical profession, well-known and valued in Bath.

“ My lord ! ” said that gentleman, recovering from a profound bow, “ I have such particular reasons for desiring to speak to you, that it would be an impertinence to apologise for being where I am.”

To say the truth, the bow of the Earl was a good deal more haughty than was needful ; and the impatience of his look in the direction of the door, closed by Mr. —, was insufficiently restrained by his *noblesse*.

“I regret,” said Mr. —, “to bring your lordship very painful intelligence—so painful, that my best hope is you may not be absolutely unprepared for it.”

His lordship's presence of mind was equal to the occasion. He supposed Mr. ——'s visit related to the event that had just taken place; but he did not know it. He said not one word, therefore, and Mr. —— proceeded,

“I had been dining,” he said, “at the house of a friend two doors off, and quitted it early to walk home. In going up Pulteney-street, and as I neared the opening opposite —— House, a female figure emerged from it—from the opening—on to the pavement before me. Its height and a peculiarity of movement attracted my notice; indeed, the last presently rivetted my professional eye, and became more distinct to me as, quickening a little my pace, I diminished the distance between the figure and myself, both walking in the same direction. There was not another creature near, yet it seemed that my footsteps

—in evening boots, it is true—were unheard. Notwithstanding, the lady advanced with considerable rapidity. I was not long in overtaking her, and, turning my head in the moment of doing so, I recognized Lady Featherstone, and saw she carried something that she pressed closely to her bosom, in her arms.

“My lord; the expression of her ladyship’s countenance, with the peculiarity of movement that had in the first place arrested my eye, would have rendered it the duty of any medical man to pause under the circumstances. I did so—had hardly done so, when the Countess uttered a piercing shriek, succeeded by cries, that brought many persons to their windows.

“Her ladyship was at the moment exactly opposite Captain Selwyn’s house; and Mrs. Selwyn, having raised a blind in her drawing-room, and perceived my features by the additional light this act of hers had thrown into the street, ran down to the door herself and

opened it. Most fortunate it was she did so, for Lady Featherstone, who had retreated from me upon the steps, and whose screams had already begun to attract persons to the spot, flew past her into the hall, up the stairs, and into the larger drawing-room, in the further corner of which, behind a table covered by china and bijouterie, that with a singular dexterity she avoided disturbing, she esconced herself with terrified, yet defiant eyes, and always clasping, even passionately, to her bosom, the object she carried. There, my lord, I left her. While unapproached, such is her condition ; but, at the slightest movement towards her, she fills the room with her shrieks."

The Earl had made a single turn in the apartment during the concluding words of Mr. ——. When that gentleman became silent, his lordship, too, paused.

"Do you," the latter asked, "desire me, sir, to understand that Lady Featherstone is mad?"

“It seems to me, my lord,” Mr —— replied, “that what I have witnessed can only be explained by, at least, a temporary aberration of mind. Your lordship will form your own opinion. It is possible that what her ladyship holds in her arms may be important.”

“In what way, sir?”

“It would be important, my lord, if it should furnish a reasonable cause for the excitement manifested.”

“Are these cases treated by yourself?”

“Not otherwise than as every medical man may consider himself competent to treat them. They have not been my peculiar care—and, unless your lordship desire otherwise, my interference in this one will end with the communication it has been my painful duty to make.”

Even while Mr. —— was speaking, he perceived the eye of Lord Featherstone become attentive to some other sound. It was probably a footstep outside, for almost

directly after, the house-bell was quietly rung.

The Earl had paused in a direct line with the dining-room door, and when this last opened to admit the woman Bella Davis, that person stood face to face with him. A moment she waited for the closing of the door behind her; then she said—

“A green silk down cushion has been removed from Mrs. Templar's bed—has been taken from the house. My lord! the shadow that passed across the curtain was not hers! There has been someone in the room!”

CONCLUSION.

“ Say, traveller, in all merry England, where
The human foot a sweeter path shall tread ?
High rise on flowery banks the hedge-rows there,
And the green boughs entwine above your head ;
While now and then over a landscape fair
The eye through some cool opening is led :
A tiny brooklet prattles at your side——”

CONCLUSION.

AND more than twenty years after the date of the events related in the last chapter, the public journals present to my eye as often as it falls on them the names of Lord Featherstone and of him I have called Montresor. They are both peers now; they sit in the Upper House on the same benches; they have held office together; they pass each other frequently in those places made luminous by the envied section of society to which they belong; they even—so it must needs be—sometimes eat together at the tables of other men. I do not suppose their eyes often meet, but their voices must occasionally enter each others' ears. For my Lord Featherstone, it is known that somewhere behind the scenes there is a countess who was nobody, and whom

madness or misconduct or both have divided from her lord. For Montresor—whom we shall not know in these pages otherwise than as Montresor, and who we have seen to be no shunner of female society—he is believed to cherish with an extraordinary fidelity the memory of a fair wife of his youth; a wife who was somebody, and whom, therefore, society can permit him to lament. Society, whose carriages frequently pass him on a certain road out of London, returns the bow of a personage engaged in a thoughtful and statesmanlike ride for exercise. It is ignorant that the ride in the one direction is of daily occurrence, and that its limit is a large but unpretending house standing in its own grounds, and reached by a lane that diverges from the road.

At a side-door of this house in which Lady Featherstone is concealed from the world, Montresor has not omitted to present himself once in every eight and thirty hours during twenty years.

Let us follow on a sweet May morning of

the year 186—the dainty footsteps of his well-known mare through such a lane as is described on the page prefixed to this chapter, past a plain, substantial gate opening on the broad gravel sweep that ascends to the house we have mentioned. Let us follow past this gate to a smaller one some hundred yards further on, through which Montresor leads his graceful favourite, touching in the same moment the handle of a bell, which returns no sound to his ear, but nevertheless brings forward almost immediately from a side path a man into whose hands Montresor, when he has bestowed a little caress on Bianca, consigns her rein. Then without question or comment he turns to the right, pursuing for perhaps some fifty paces a road bordered by turf and a few straggling trees, which brings him to a second wall and to a single door in it, heavy, and strengthened with nails. This he opens with a key taken from his own pocket, and with the same key carefully relocks. He is now in an enclosure which it is a little difficult to designate. Its dimensions will not bear the

name of wood, and that of shrubbery is more inappropriate still; since many of the trees are old and gnarled and moss-grown, and the birds are singing in boughs high above Montresor's head. Call it as we may, the nobleman we follow is familiar with its paths, and a less than ten minutes' walk has brought him to a quiet entrance in an old ivied angle of the same house that presents so different an aspect to those who approach it by the principal gate. Here he rings, and is kept for some moments waiting.

And while he waits, his back to the door, and his clear blue eye turned not uncheerfully to the pleasant May morning light, I should like the reader who has gone with me so far, to see him once again with my vision. I know not whether it is that men age less early than they formerly did, or whether as we ourselves advance in years we become more indulgent to an alteration, but honestly I cannot see such change in Montresor as any friend of his need lament. He must be sixty, yet it seems to me that in the tall figure—

slighter and a little less erect than it once was ; in the scantier hair whose fairness renders not very perceptible the silver with which it begins to be mingled ; in the chiselled features and Saxon skin to which time has even added delicacy ; in the clear eyes, purified of much of their trouble, and holding in its room the wisdom and the patience of twenty additional years ; in the sweet, firm mouth around which dwell the memories and experiences, the passions and poetries of well-nigh an ordinary lifetime, the hopes and aspirations that only a second and a loftier life can satisfy ; in the whole features, countenance, and form, there is a charm and a power to attract the eye and the heart of even youthful beauty from most men of half his years—nay, from such a man as he himself was at half his present age.

The narrow door opens, and he enters, and pauses within while the fastenings are replaced by fingers accustomed to the task, and then follows the person—a woman—who has admitted him, a few steps in the direction of a narrow staircase lighted by a window high up

in the wall. At the foot of this staircase, however, the woman pauses.

“You will be so good, sir,” she says, “as to walk this way;” and, turning to the left, precedes him along a narrow matted passage, through a door that closes firmly but without noise behind them, across a handsome inner hall, again through a door the movement of whose hinges evokes the sound of a musical bell within an apartment the immediate entrance to which is at once thrown open by an elderly male individual, of low stature, and possessing keen dark eyes, white hair, and a goodly phrenological development that rejoices us. We are convinced that Dr. —— is a man about whom there can be no mistake, even before we have witnessed the perfect cordiality and mutual respect with which his visitor and he shake hands. The face of Montresor is, however, a shade paler than it was when we observed it last, and his eye is for an instant an anxious one.

“No need whatever for alarm, my lord! Simply,” and here Dr. —— drew forward the

chair nearest to Montresor, "simply for a little care. There has been one of the old efforts of mind; after," he added, placing his hand upon a book which he had probably quitted at the moment he admitted Montresor, "an interval of over three years."

"And with the old result?"

"And with the old result. Not to the old extent."

"Not?"

"The paroxysm was less violent, and yielded sooner to the proper treatment."

"Thank God!"

"I should not, however, be doing my duty if I suffered your lordship to entertain for a moment the idea that my fixed opinion is in any way altered by that fact. It is not."

"Yet you did not expect another effort?"

"I did not expect it, but it has always been, and may always be, possible."

"And recovery you still believe is not so?"

"Recovery I still believe is not so. I still believe that the exceeding horror and agony

occasioned by every effort of memory will each time undo more than has been done. The weakness of this last paroxysm as compared with former ones implies to me that the mental power is weaker, not stronger, than formerly. It implies also, to me, a decline of bodily strength ; a natural decline—the work of years.”

“Ay,” Montresor says, and covers the upper part of his face with one hand as he speaks, “of years.”

“My lord, I have done my duty. It has been a very painful one.”

“Thanks—thanks !” Montresor replies, and rises with the words. “I think Dr. —— we know each other. And I am to see her ?”

“I have no objection. You will find her tranquil, nor do I apprehend any return of excitement ; indeed, should such take place, it would go far to shake my, at present, fixed opinion.”

Even while these words are being spoken both men begin to quit the room. The doctor throws open first the inner, then the

outer doors, beyond which last the woman who admitted Montresor is in attendance.

“I am not accompanying you,” says the master of the house. “I prefer your lordship should make your visit in the accustomed manner. I apprehend nothing. I shall be within the house for another hour; after that time I have an engagement I cannot longer defer.”

“Thanks! always thanks!” replies the nobleman, and follows the woman’s footsteps.

We, however, will precede them, and transport ourselves to the apartment—the large, airy, richly-furnished apartment—giving on a garden, where art in the way of flowers and fountains, and turf, smooth and thick as velvet, has done its utmost—in which, on one of the satin couches, sits the ill-fated wife of the Earl of Featherstone. She is more changed than Montresor. Her rich silk robe does not prevent us from discovering the extreme attenuation of the form beneath, nor can an elegant morsel of lace at the back of her head conceal the absence

of those golden braids which its office is not to confine but to replace. Yet she is wonderfully youthful-looking still. There is not a grey hair amidst those that are *crepés* on her forehead in one of the favourite modes of the present day ; and I think it is due chiefly to that fashionable *coiffure*, that costly robe, that we assure ourselves in the first glance it is a reality on which we gaze, and not a creation of our own eyes, or of the sunlight that streams into the room. The nearly transparent hands, around the jewelled fingers of which is sparkling the many coloured spray of the divided beam ; the slender throat, whose necklet of brilliants is clasped by a small exquisite miniature of Montresor himself ; the Parian whiteness of the almost fleshless cheek ; the ineffable blue of the large loving eyes, from which tears seem to have been wiped for ever ; the purity, the poetry, above all, the peace, seem of another world than this.

Her face is turned towards us, and she is speaking ; but not, I think, to the pleasant-

looking young woman who bends over a piece of embroidery in the window.

“My love,” she says quite simply, but in a tone the tenderness of which no words of mine can convey; “my love!” and her eyes turn slowly around with a fullness of contentment that leaves no doubt it finds the without in harmony with the within; then they descend—these blue eyes—to a cashmere shawl upon her lap, around which her arms are placed in a manner that has already attracted our attention, and the folds of which on one side reach the ground. “She sleeps,” the Countess murmurs, “and it is well. He loves her always—ah! how tenderly! but still best when sleeping. I have seen his dear eyes grow troubled when I have placed her waking in his arms. My pearl, he loves you; but he cannot understand you as I do. You know,” she says, gently lifting her eyes to an imaginary listener, “you know—do you not, that he went to St. Petersburg to fetch her. That was no light thing. It is not as

if one said, 'He went to Naples or Florence;' but St. Petersburg! It is icy cold there, and so far off, yet I went further still. Ah! you are surprised at that; but it is, perhaps, that you are not a mother. You will be more surprised at what I am going to tell you. I have been in the grave, and was dead and buried, and ascended into Heaven, and while he was seeking to bring our darling back to me I brought her back to him. Was it not charmingly done? Ah! you have heard of it before. Such a thing would be in the papers no doubt. I wonder are there papers still! Once I used to read them. That was before I died; now I have no knowledge of them. Oh, my love! my love! All I hear now—all I see"—looking around her—"is Love."

Even in ceasing to speak she rises gently from the sofa, and with care and inimitable grace disposes the peculiar folds of the shawl upon the satin cushions; then, the door having in the meantime opened to admit Montresor, she goes swiftly forward to meet him,

and casts herself, not much more heavily, we think, than a snow flake or the gauze veil from a girl's bonnet might have fallen, on his breast.

“ My darling,” he answers, and kisses again and again her forehead and cheek, and shimmering hair. “ My darling!” and she closes her fair fragile hands at the back of his neck, and lays her pale cheek against his—fresh from its bath of sweet summer morning air; and after this she lifts her head to look into his eyes, only less blue than her own, and speaks again; this time to no imaginary listener.

“ You are welcome, my love,—oh! how welcome! They say, you know, ‘ Welcome as flowers in May!’ And this is a May morning.”

“ And so beautiful a one,” Montresor answered, “ that I hoped to find you in the air. Yet this room is deliciously cool.”

“ Deliciously. Still, now you speak of it, we will go out into the air. I was a little weak this morning; I am stronger now. Shall we go, my love?”

“When you have your bonnet. Margaret!” and a slight gesture summoned the attendant, who had withdrawn on his entrance to the further end of the large apartment, “you will bring Lady Susan’s bonnet, and scarf, and gloves. We will walk under the trees. The young leaves, while they temper the light, do not yet interrupt the air; but you will need no parasol.”

This little toilette of the Countess occupies no long period. During its performance Montresor approaches the sofa, and contemplates the Cashmere shawl; nay twice approaches his lips to it, Lady Featherstone regarding him with unspeakable tenderness as he does so. Finally, he draws her arm within his own, and leads her out on to the terrace, from which the garden is reached by a flight of broad, low steps. The beds are already aglow with flowers, an emerald turf invites the feet, the waters of the fountain are sparkling like jewels in the sun, and a thrush, perched on the graceful bough of an acacia, just beyond reach of the spray, fills the charming

enclosure with its song. It is, however, into a side avenue of limes that Montresor guides the steps of the Countess, and there, arm in arm, and followed at a distance by the attendant, Margaret, they walk up and down, conversing beneath the trees.

At the end of this avenue, furthest from the terrace, is a door, in which is a little wicket. This last is open, and affords a view of a second garden, by one of the walks through which Montresor and the Countess discern the Doctor approaching them from an angle of the house. How charming is the smile of the lady! How faultless the salutation of the Doctor!

“Your ladyship is, I trust, as well as usual?”

“Thanks, Doctor! I feel as if I had taken the May morning.”

“Allow me to prescribe as much more of it as possible. Colonel Montresor will remember that I by no means equally recommend the May noon. As yet, the temperature is delicious.”

“For the moment it is a little like Heaven.

Tell my husband so, Doctor, lest he think me enthusiastic. Before one has been there, one's notions are a little vague. It used to seem to me a sort of blasphemy to assist one's ideas of Heaven by anything on earth. What an unreasonable mistake! This air, for example, is heavenly. The greatest difference is, we know it cannot last. To-morrow may be chilly; and in Heaven we fear no chill to-morrows. Ah! Doctor T. is gone. I wanted him to tell you, my love, that the security of Heaven is its greatest difference of all:—its security,—oh! its unutterable security!”

It seems to Montresor that this security, in suggesting its opposite, may be a dangerous theme to dwell on. He, then, gently directs her footsteps from the gate, and draws her attention to the tender green of the young foliage that surrounds them. She gazes, is a little thoughtful, then turns her eyes from the foliage to his face.

“You love green so much? Perhaps I have been wrong. The house building for us is of sapphire.

“My dearest! I love a green tree; but let all things else be blue as your own eyes.”

“And yours. Now I know why I love a sapphire, and chose it for our home in Heaven. You cannot judge of it by this fragment that I wear,—scarcely more than by a dewdrop, of the sea under a summer sun. Ah! it is charming,—a house of sapphire. Not of sapphires. We do not say in heaven, a house of rubies or of sapphires. We do not speak here, you know, of houses of granites or of Portland stones. The terrace that surrounds it will be of gold, shining like a mirror, and the entrance-gate a pearl. In thinking of my loves, I spared nothing. But we must be patient. ‘Rome was not built in a day,’ and even the roses must have time. We will not shake the handle of the fastened door, like greedy babes agog for Easter presents; but wait, with whisperings among ourselves of things we hope for, nay, are sure of, till the door be opened from within. And, then, to-day,” she murmurs, and lifts her cheek from the shoulder of Montresor, and her happy

eyes to the delicate tracery of leaves overhead, and to the beautiful blue sky beyond, "to-day is like a breath, a strain, a perfume from it all."

And now, if the reader have gathered the nature of Lady Featherstone's delusion from the foregoing scene, my task is done. Need I explain that she conceives herself to be the dead wife of Montresor's youth? The last faint echoes of the shrieks of her suffering have gone away from her into the distance; but do you believe they are not still heard by Montresor? do you not believe they sometimes startle the Earl of Featherstone from his sleep? I believe they are; I believe they do. And it is because I believe it, I wait patiently to hear that one or other of those noble lords has risen in the Upper House to introduce a Bill for the greater Publicity of Marriage.

THE END.



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